
CHARACTERS
OF REAL
DEVOTION.

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THE X
CHARACTERS
OF REAL
DEVOTION.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF
L'Abbé G ROU,
BY THE REV. ALEXANDER CLINTON.

The Second Edition.

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To JAMES NANGLE

OF KILDALKEY, Esq.

WHO, TO A PERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF

THEOLOGY,

AS WELL AS ALL OTHER

BRANCHES

OF POLITE LITERATURE,

UNITES THE PRACTICE OF

CHRISTIAN CHARITY

AND REAL DEVOTION,

THIS TREATISE

Is most respectfully inscribed, by his

Most obliged

Humble Servants,

THE EDITORS.

Dublin, March

25, 1795.



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THE
C H A R A C T E R S
O F R E A L
D E V O T I O N.

NOTWITHSTANDING the general decay of piety, there are many who still profess devotion ; but few have a just idea of it ; almost all follow in this particular their prejudices, their imagination, their disposition, their self-love. From hence arises that infinite number of defects to which the devout of both sexes are subject, of every age, rank and condition, and which are wrongfully ascribed to devotion itself. These defects are not always hurtful to salvation ; but they are hurtful to perfection, and

are obstacles to holiness. They are to worldlings an occasion of raillery and of blasphemy ; to the weak a subject of scandal ; to the commonalty of Christians a pretext which keeps them in their state of tepidity, and with-holds them from embracing a devout life. What powerful reasons are these to induce pious souls, who have a feeling for the glory of God, for their own interests and for those of their neighbour, to conceive in the sense of the gospel an exact notion of devotion, and to express it in their conduct !

I purpose to set before them a faithful picture of it in this small tract. I invite them to observe all the lineaments of it with an attentive eye, and then to cast a look on themselves. Self-love is so blind, the human will is so weak, that I dare not hope that they will draw from that comparison all the advantage, which naturally might be expected ; whether it be that people in general do not see them-



themselves as they really are ; or because a long habit, become almost a second nature, takes from them the courage and even the desire of becoming better ; or finally because they find the model to be too perfect, and, in the despair of coming up to it, they will not attempt to resemble it.

Be that as it will, I shall think myself happy if a few reap benefit from it. Besides, I do not write for devout people only. Many Christians are in suspense between an ordinary life, and an open profession of solid piety. This work is perhaps the means, which God chuses to make use of to determine them, and to fix them unalterably in virtue. There are sinners, who return to God daily : they have hitherto been ignorant of the manner of serving him ; they will be pleased to find themselves enabled to be instructed in it, by a book, the perusal of which requires but a few hours. In short, young people who

begin to give themselves to God, ought to be enlightened, and taught the right road that leads to him. As they have no prejudices to fight against, or bad habits to correct, it will suffice to point out to them the path, to engage them to walk in it, and to preserve themselves from the errors and imperfections of a mis-understood devotion.

To them in particular I recommend this book. Those, who are charged with their education, may put it into their hands, when they shall judge them fit to understand it and profit by it ; that is, at the age in which their reason and their hearts are sufficiently unfolded. I do not think it adviseable for them to read it sooner. The first impression is always the most decisive for the good or bad success of a work of piety ; if once it fails, it is hardly recoverable : And therefore it is proper to wait, until it can be solid and well-grounded :

II.

What is devotion? Each one defines it in his own way. To a libertine, the being devout, is to believe in God, and to have some principles of religion. To a saint, it is to be absorbed and lost in God. Between these two extremes, there is almost an endless number of definitions, which are more or less just, as they approach the one and recede from the other.

To define it exactly, I adhere to the word itself, and to the idea which it expresses. The word *devotion* is latin, and in our language it precisely signifies, the state of being devoted or dedicated. Therefore to be devout is the same thing as to be devoted to God. It is upon the idea, which the term of being *devoted* offers to the mind, that I shall ground whatever I have to say on *devotion*; after having premised, that when God, and our duties towards him are in question, the word

word should be taken in the most serious and the most extensive sense.

Now, in English as well as in Latin, we know no expression that is stronger than that of being *devoted*, in order to express the utmost attachment, the absolute and voluntary dependence, the affectionate zeal, in a word the disposition of the mind and heart of wholly submitting ourself to the will of another, of preventing his wishes, of embracing his interests, and of sacrificing every thing for his sake. Thus we say of a child, a servant, a subject, that he is devoted to his father, to his master, to his prince. We also say that a man is devoted to ambition, or to any other passion, when he only thinks of satisfying it; when he seeks every means, directs all his views and enterprises to that purpose, and when it so absorbs him, that he hardly can pay attention to any other object.

The being devoted to God comprehends all this in the most eminent degree;

degree ; and it adds besides a consecration, by virtue of which, he, who is consecrated, belongs no longer to himself, has no longer a right over himself, and appertains, by the most sacred and the most irrevocable act of religion, to the Supreme Being, to whom he has devoted himself.

Such is the idea, which I form to myself of devotion, by explaining the precise signification of the word. The practice of it, I own, has its beginning, its progress and its perfection ; but the act of dedication should be full, entire and perfect in the will, at the moment in which it is formed. Without going further, and from this simple definition, we may pretty well judge how rare devotion is among Christians, and whether we ourselves be devout.

III.

The consecration, which we owe to God, is singular in its kind ; it is grounded on titles, which only appertain to him, and which he cannot share with

with any one else. God is our first beginning and our last end. He has created us and preserves us every moment. We are indebted to him for all the advantages, we possess both of soul and body : the heavens, the earth, and all the good things we enjoy are the work of his hands and the gifts of his liberal beneficence ; he disposes at pleasure of every event ; and his providence has our welfare in view in all his designs and arrangements.

He has made us that we might know him, love him, and serve him, and thereby merit the eternal possession of him. Enriched, from our first origin, with all the benefits of nature and of grace, a lasting felicity was attached to the observance of a precept, which is the most simple, the most just and the most easy. But being fallen from that supernatural state, through the disobedience of our first parents, God has re-instated us in it by an admirable invention of his love, in giving

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us his own Son, and taking vengeance on him for our sins, that he might make room for mercy.

To the general benefit of redemption, add those which are particular. A good education, the many graces of preservation, the many sins forgiven, the tender reproaches and secret invitations to return to him, the many marks, in short, of a special predilection.

God is our sovereign good, and, to speak properly, he is our only good. As we have received all from him, so also do we expect all from him in future, as we only can be happy through him. He is our King, our Lawgiver, our Rewarder, the Supreme Arbitrator of our doom. Add to this what he is in himself, the eternity and the infinity of his being and of his perfections. Add also that which he is to us, in the person of Jesus Christ.

Pause now for a moment: reflect on each one of these titles, which I have barely

barely mentioned : weigh the force of them ; estimate their full value ; appraise the claims they have over you, the sentiments they exact from you, and the obligations they impose upon you. After having considered them separately, re-unite them ; and conceive, if you can, the immense extent of the duties, which relatively to you, result from them. Measure the capacity of your heart ; and see if it could discharge the debts, which it owes to God, although it were to exhaust itself in respect, love, gratitude and submission. Judge whether your consecration, how far foever you may carry it, will ever bear a proportion to so many titles.

IV.

All other consecrations, even the most lawful, cannot be compared with that : nothing is more evident. But besides, every consecration that should stand in opposition to it, that should in the least trench upon it, or even that were

were not entirely subordinate to it, would be an outrage which God necessarily must condemn and punish. The homage, the respect, the love, the obedience, which we pay to any creature whatever, are no farther just and pleasing to God, than he himself commands and authorises them, no farther than they keep within the bounds,— which he has prescribed, no farther than they are referred to him, and are the expression of the supreme homage, of the infinite respect, of the unparallelled love and of the absolute obedience, which are due to him alone. The true Christian knows but one consecration, of which all the others are only an extension and an application, *viz.* that which appertains to God. He consecrates to him alone his mind, his heart and his body; for him alone does he breathe, think and act: God is the principle, the motive and the end of all the duties he fulfils towards his neighbour.

V.

The first and grand object of devotion or consecration (for I shall promiscuously make use of these two terms) is therefore the glory of God, and the accomplishment of his will. God himself, in all his works, can have no other motive, and he does not allow a Christian, or rather he absolutely forbids him to substitute any other. We only exist to glorify God, and we only can glorify him by loving and obeying him. This glory of God must hold the first place in our thoughts and in our desires : it must be the spring of all our actions. Every other intention, although good and holy, must yield to this.

The Lord's prayer instructs us in this. The first petitions relate only to God and to the interests of his glory. *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name* ; may all rational creatures praise thee, adore thee, and emulously celebrate thy holiness ; may they imitate

tate thee, in becoming holy themselves, because thou art holy, and perfect, as thou art perfect ; and be thou hallowed in them and by them. *Thy kingdom come* ; may all creatures acknowledge thee for their only sovereign ; may they establish thee the absolute master of their heart, and may they invite thee to exercise over them the supreme dominion, of which thou art so jealous. *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* The angels and the blessed know no other law, than thy will : it is the principle of the order, of the peace and of the charity, that reigns amongst them, and they place all their happiness in accomplishing it. May it be the same here below among men ; may they only use their liberty to submit it, not only to thy orders, but also to thy good-will, and to the appointments of thy adorable providence. Such ought to be the most intimate and the most ardent vows of true devotion. Are they ours ? Does

the heart accompany the mouth that utters them daily ? Do our intentions and actions vouch for the sincerity of our prayer ?

VI.

The second object of the truly devout man, is his own sanctification. He efficaciously wishes it, not as an embellishment and as a perfection of his soul, but as a thing, which God commands, which is pleasing to him, and which contributes to his glory. It is not to take complacency in his virtues, that he endeavours to acquire them, but to please God. Neither is he anxious to know whether he do please him, but acting with uprightness and simplicity, he looks not for a testimony of the worth of his actions.

In like manner, if he carefully shuns every sin and every imperfection, it is not merely because it is a stain and a deformity of the soul ; but because it is an offence against God, a disorder that displeases the infinite holiness

lines and purity of his looks; an object that is odious to him, and provokes his indignation: so that at the time that he is sorry, with respect to God, for a fault committed, he is well pleased with the sentiment of abasement and humiliation, which his fault occasions in him.

He aims at holiness, not to appropriate it to himself, or to possess it as his own property, but to pay homage to God by it, and to give to him all the glory of it, as to the only source of holiness.

He wishes to become a saint, not in his own way, and according to his own ideas, but according to the views and the ideas of God. He is not ignorant that his sanctification is much more the work of God than his own. that far from being able of himself to do any thing towards it, he would spoil the work, were he to attempt to begin it; that God must begin, continue and finish; that it is his part to leave the

whole to the great artificer, to put no obstacle in the way, and to second the design of the first mover by his consent and co-operation.

Finally his desires do not lead him to a sublime holiness, through a false elevation of sentiments, and through a jealous emulation of some privileged souls ; but he only wishes to fill up the measure of holiness, to which God calls him, to correspond with the graces which he receives from him, and to be faithful according to the extent of the degree he is in : he is as well pleased at having received but one talent, provided he employed it properly, as if he had received two or even five.

VII.

The third object of devotion, which is what interests us the most, is our own happiness. It is inseparably annexed to our being devoted to God. To be happy, is to be united to the sovereign good ; and devotion commences that union here below, in order to

to consummate it in eternity. Our happiness is also a necessary consequence of our sanctification; for it is a certain principle that what tends to render the soul better, tends on that very account to render it more happy. Perfection and happiness are to each other like the cause and the effect. This is true even with regard to God, in whom happiness is not so much a perfection, as it is the result of his infinite perfections. It is therefore incontestable that devotion, when well understood and practised, is the source and the only source, of the solid happiness which men can enjoy upon earth.

But this transient happiness is but a shadow, if compared to the eternal beatitude, which God promises to those who shall have been devoted to him. In providing for his own glory, he has not neglected our welfare: on the contrary, he will have our interest to depend on his glory, and that, in our

sub-

submission to his will, we should find all the advantages both of this and the other life. If devotion do not always produce such an effect here below, the fault is on the side of those who misunderstand it, and practise it improperly.

In the infinitely just and the infinitely simple ideas of the divine mind, the two other objects are reduced to the first, and are blended with it. God sees the glory which he expects from us, he sees in it our holiness, he sees in it our happiness. For this reason the truly devout man considers his sanctification but as the means to glorify God; and his own happiness but as included in the glory of God, of which it is the sequence. He therefore makes this glory his principal object, and the great end of his actions, from this conviction that he will become holy and happy in proportion as he shall have procured it. He does not exclude the other two objects: God forbid; he even often

often thinks of them ; but the first prevails, and covers, as it were, the other two.

It is not so with an ordinary devout man. The object to which he gives the preference, and his greatest attention is his salvation. He has only this view in mind ; he does what he thinks is proper to secure it ; he shuns what he judges may expose it to danger : this is the measure of his holiness, and he hardly proceeds farther. As to the glory of God, he seldom acts directly for that, though he will admit of nothing that may oppose it. Thus does the love of his own interest, which he considers preferably to every thing else, induce him to invert the order which God would have him place between these three objects. From hence arise all the defects of his devotion.

VIII.

Let us come to a detail of the qualities which characterize the being devoted

voted to God. No one is ignorant that devotion is supernatural, in which light soever we may view it : supernatural in its object, which is God known, not merely by reason, but by faith ; in its motives, in its means, and in its end : supernatural, in as much as it is impossible for man to conceive an idea of it, by the only light of his reason, or to embrace it by the power only of his will, or to put it in practice by his own strength only : supernatural, because far from being favorable in any thing to corrupt nature, it opposes it, and aims at reforming it.

We cannot therefore be attracted to devotion but by the action of grace, which enlightens the mind, solicits the will, and fortifies liberty : we cannot maintain ourselves in it, or advance in it, or attain to the perfection of it, but by the help of grace.

And as, exclusive of some certain graces which entirely prevent the soul, God does not grant the others but by means

means of prayer ; it follows that the first thing that devotion inspires is an inclination to prayer ; or rather it is itself that *spirit of grace* and of *prayer*, which God promises by his prophet* to diffuse on his people. It is a spirit of prayer, that is to say a disposition, an habitual tendency of the soul towards God, by adoring his supreme majesty, by giving thanks for his blessing, by asking pardon for past offences, by praying for the helps which are needful to our weakness ; it is a spirit of grace, because this disposition and this tendency are the effect of grace.

I say, an habitual disposition which always subsists in the will, which constantly keeps it bent towards God, and which, according to the occasion and exigency, is produced by positive and formal acts, that are expressed by word of mouth or by the heart. These po-

* Zach. xii. 10.

sitive acts cannot be continual: but the interior affection that produces and animates them, may and ought to be so. And it is this habitual elevation of the soul to God, which is meant by the precept of Jesus Christ, *we ought always to pray, and not to faint**.

If you have this spirit of prayer, you have true devotion. But you have it not yet, if you only pray through duty or necessity, and not through relish and inclination; if the exercise of it be painful to you, and repugnant, if it cost you much labour: if you find it irksome, and are listless, tepid and wilfully distracted in it; if you count the moments you spend in it, if you curtail it as much as you can: if in short you pay God, as a bad debtor pays his debts. We may in this manner say many prayers, through habit, human respect, and by rote, with-

* Luke xviii. 1.

our having the spirit of prayer, and there is nothing so common.

IX.

But this spirit of prayer is evidently an interior spirit, because it is a spirit of grace, *the spirit of the Son, which God has sent into our hearts, crying Abba, Father** that is to say, putting in us a filial affection, which is like a continual cry of the heart towards God our Father. This divine spirit is more interior, than any thing that is the most intimate in us ; and it displays its action on the most noble faculties of the soul, on our understanding, our will and our liberty. True devotion therefore is essentially interior : it resides in the inmost of the heart, from whence it inspires good thoughts and sentiments. From within it communicates itself without, and gives life to all the exterior works of piety.

* Gal. iv 6.

In fact, what would a merely exterior devotion be, which consisted only in words and vain protestations, or at most in actions which did not proceed from the heart? It would be a phantom of devotion, which might deceive men who only judge from appearances; but it could not deceive God, whose eye goes straight to the heart. Men pay more attention to the advantages of the service which they receive, than to the goodness of the will with which they are served.

But what need has God of our homages? They are no farther pleasing than they are glorious to him; and they are no farther glorious to him, than they are sincere and than they flow from the heart.

Devotion is also interior, because it withdraws the soul from the exterior objects that cause dissipation: it brings the soul back to itself, and unites it to God in its own interior. The soul is therefore taught to restrain the senses, to

to regulate the imagination, to suppress vain thoughts, to quiet emotions, to confine desires, and to collect all its strength in order to keep itself united to the object to which it is devoted. By this interior union with God, the soul sanctifies not only its vocal and mental prayers, not only the practice of its duties and good works, but also all animal actions, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, and such as seem to be the most indifferent, referring them to the glory of God, according to the advice of the Apostle.

Devotion gives an experimental knowledge of that saying of Jesus Christ, *the kingdom of heaven is within you**, the meaning of which no one can comprehend but he who is truly devout. God, by the operation of his grace, exercises this kingdom on the soul of him who is devoted to him, and renders it attentive to his voice,

* Luke xvii. 4.

by which at every instant he makes known to it his will. And, as this voice is infinitely delicate, and as it cannot be heard in the dissipation, in the hurry and bustle of the passions, the soul that has once felt the charms of it, and knows how beneficial it is to be docile to it, endeavours to keep itself in recollection, in calmness, in an interior solicitude, and in the greatest attention, that it may lose none of the instructions and admonitions which God is pleased to give it.

It is thus that a servant, who is devoted to his master, who is always ready to do his will, never permits himself to be distracted by other matters ; he is attentive to his words, tries to understand them, observes his motions and the smallest signs of his intentions.

This attention must be continual, because the action of grace on the soul, is continual. It is a thread that directs the soul, which it must constantly keep

keep in hand, for should it let go for a moment, it cannot but go astray. In fact, whosoever has seriously given himself to God, experiences that his interior admonitions are continual, and he sensibly feels them, until he has acquired a habit of acting through the spirit of grace; but when once this spirit is become familiar, and as it were natural, he follows it almost imperceptibly, though the influence of it on his actions is the same.

Should it be objected, that so close and continued an attention must be very painful; I answer, in the first place, that a truly devout man never will start such an objection, and that it never will occur to him. This is clear to every one who understands the meaning of being devoted to God. I answer, in the second place, that if it be painful, it is sweetened by love, and habit facilitates what at first was difficult.

X.

It would however be a gross illusion to imagine, that devotion must be wholly interior, and, under pretence that God sees the interior, to suppress vocal prayer and other exterior marks of piety. We are men, and not pure spirits. It is proper that the body should share in the homages of the soul, and that our chief organs should be employed in the praises of God. We have received them for this purpose, and it is the noblest use we can make of them. The whole man should adore and pray.

Besides the soul itself stands in need of being roused and supported in its piety, by what affects the senses. Hence the exterior apparel of the worship, the order and the majesty of the ceremonies, the motions and inflection of the singing, the sight of pictures, and of other pious objects, are necessary means to entertain devotion. The decent and humble composure of the body

body, the knees bent, the hands joined, the eyes modestly cast down, or lifted up towards heaven, are so many expressions of the respect, and of the attention of the soul in prayer, which is naturally and imperceptibly led to join in sentiment with these exterior testimonies.

Add to this, the edification which we owe to our neighbour, who can only judge of our piety from what is apparent. And also, that as religion is the first link of society, it exacts a common, public, and consequently an exterior worship, in which men pay their vows, and offer their prayers to God, and animate each other to sing his praises. The ecclesiastical ministry, which is of divine institution, is an evident proof of the necessity of an exterior worship.

There was never one more truly devout, even in the greatest solitude, who had not stated times in the day for vocal prayer. The interior spirit itself

itself inspires it even into those who are the most contemplative.

Whether therefore we pray to God in the places of resort, or in private, we should so attend to mental prayer as not to omit that which is vocal. The first could not long uphold itself without the second, and would infallibly degenerate into a proud and dangerous inactivity. In proportion as it is difficult to discharge properly the duty of vocal prayer, unless it be joined to the practice of mental prayer, which is the source from whence the interior spirit flows, so is it difficult for the soul to support itself in bare contemplation without the occasional assistance of vocal prayer. It even commonly happens in contemplation, that the soul expresses its affections and transports by words, looks, sighs, tears, and other motions which are almost forced from it; and this proceeds from the union between the soul and

and body, and from their mutual correspondence.

XI.

If it be an abuse to exclude vocal prayer from devotion, it is a much more common one to banish from it mental prayer. This may be excusable in vulgar ignorant people, who hardly make use of their reason, as also, in the first heat of youth, in whom the extreme levity of the imagination stands in need of some sensible object to fix it! But is it pardonable, in persons of riper years, and who are better informed, not to know how to pray, but with a book in hand; and to imagine, that they are idle, unless they move their lips, and that God does not hear them, unless they articulate their petitions, often loud enough to disturb those who are praying by them? How many pious women go to Church, loaded with books, in which all their devotion is contained? You see them take up one after the other, for this or for

for that purpose, on this and on that occasion. The acts and the forms are ready drawn up, they have only to pronounce them; and provided they have omitted none of them, they think they have discharged their duty, and that God demands no more of them. Nevertheless the least act formed by the heart, the least sentiment of their own, would be more pleasing to God, and more beneficial to themselves. But their heart is seized, dry and empty; it says nothing amidst the flow of words which the mouth utters.

In vain do they alledge, that prayers, ready made, move and nourish their devotion. I can hardly believe it of those methodical acts, in which are expressed, in fine language, sentiments that are foreign to those who recite them, and perhaps to him who composed them. But I will allow, that they move at first on account of their novelty, and that the imagination is affected by them much more than the heart.

heart. People tire at last of forms that recur daily: they cease to make an impression: they cloy: they are repeated mechanically and by rote: then others are sought for which have no better effect.

Why do we not take up an early habit of recollection, of seeking, as David did, in our heart, the prayer, which we wish to make to God, of complaining to him of our coldness and insensibility, and of conjuring him to supply our spiritual poverty? Would it be praying ill, humbly to acknowledge, in his presence, our misery, to implore the assistance of his grace; and if, at intervals, we feel some good sentiments, to ascribe them, with gratitude, to the author of all gifts.

When the source of devotion is in the heart, it is inexhaustible; the reflections, which flow from it, continually vary, and produce, at each time, a fresh relish. In order to express them,

them, there is no need of studied speeches ; the most simple, the most natural, and the most lively expressions immediately present themselves. Even the silence of a heart, that is moved and softened, is more eloquent than words ; and frequently it is the only way left to testify what is experienced.

Is it not clear, that such forms of prayer encourage laziness, and dispense with the preparation for prayer, which the wise man enjoins ?* The opening and reading of the book is all the preparation.

You must not speak to such people of meditation. They cannot meditate, they say ; their head will not bear it. I own, that meditation is painful to those who are not used to reflect ; that lively imaginations are not much calculated for it, and that few heads are capable of continuing it for a

* Eccl. xviii. 13.

great

for a great length of time. Should they be advised to drop all reflections, once they are in the presence of God, and to go to affections; they will answer, that their will is not easily moved; that if they have a good thought, it presently vanishes, and on this account they make use of books.

If you tell them to keep themselves at rest, and gently to draw down the ~~ew~~ from heaven, by reiterated, vivid and short acts, they condemn this rest as a state of idleness, and express their aversion to this manner of praying, which however is that of interior souls. For which reason they are not interior, and they dread so to be. And yet they imagine themselves devout, because they say many things, and converse long with God; but this only serves to fatigue their lungs without inflaming the heart.

Let them say what they will, self-love guides their prayers; they pray more to please themselves than to

please God. They aim at a palpable proof that they really pray, and therefore they spend themselves in a recital of a collection of forms of prayer, and speak some aloud, that the ear may be an additional witness. St. Anthony, who doubtless was truly devout, was not of this way of thinking ; for being asked, which was the best manner of praying, answered, " It is when we pray without perceiving it."

Another abuse of exterior devotion, is that of multiplying the practices of it so much as almost to render it impracticable. The day is hardly long enough to people of this temper ; they retain their ancient methods, and daily assume new ones ; so that their mind is constrained, and their liberty encroached upon ; they often trench on the duties of their state of life, in order to pray : or if they try to do both at once, their attention is so divided, that they do neither as they ought. It is certainly very proper to

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intermix some ejaculatory prayers with our occupations, and now and then to suspend them, in order to renew the thought of the presence of God. But such prayers should be short, and come rather from the heart than the lips.

XII.

True devotion admits of no reserve. It consists in yielding ourselves up totally to grace, and in being resolved to go as far as that will lead us. To yield ourselves up to grace, is to remove all the obstacles we know of, that are a hindrance to its action: it is to follow it, step by step, with an exact fidelity, and never to prevent it, or throw ourselves into any of the excesses of an indiscreet servor. People are liable to this fault, in the first transports of their new-conceived love. Several saints have blamed themselves for it, and in particular St. Bernard, who ruined his stomach at an early period, by too much abstinence. The devil also often interferences, who, on our

entering the career, endeavours to exhaust our strength, that he may prevent us from finishing it, and engage us to desist.

But in every other respect, it is clear, that to enter into a composition with God, to be unwilling to use violence with ourselves but to a certain degree, to set bounds to our spiritual race, and to resolve not to exceed them, is not a devotion of ourselves to God, but a giving of ourselves to him with measure and restriction. In the intimate connexions, which may intervene between men and men, it is necessary that there should be restrictions; for the right, which God has over us, must always be excepted. But as God is infinitely superior to all that exists, and as nothing can limit the exercise of his dominion over his creatures, his service is not, of itself, susceptible of any reserve, and whosoever embraces it, should embrace it without any exception or condition.

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For to devote ourselves to him, is to engage ourselves to acknowledge no other law than his supreme will, and to conform ourselves to it, how painful soever it may be to nature.

Neither must we alledge our weakness, and say, I never should be able to do such and such things, even though grace should demand it of me. The will of God renders possible whatever it commands, because it always joins to the commandments the means of accomplishing it. God would be unjust, if, whilst he expressed a desire of our doing any thing, he did not give us sufficient assistance, since of ourselves we can do nothing. You read some heroical deeds in the lives of saints; and, whilst you admire them, you despair of imitating them. But how do you know, that God will demand such things of you? And if he should, why could you not do with his grace, what this and the other did? Be not therefore frightened: What

appears to you to-day absolutely impracticable, will seem to you, if not easy, at least very possible, when the time of action comes on.

It is not always an evil will that prompts us to these secret reserves, when we engage in the path of devotion: if it were, I would not hesitate to advance, that a devotion like this were false and illusive; that we should evidently expose ourselves to fail in our engagements, as God owes us no graces, whereby we are to serve him, as we chuse ourselves; and that we should hazard even our salvation, howsoever desirous we might be of securing it. The ordinary cause of these reserves is, that, seeing before us the vast career of sanctity, and consulting only our present strength, we fancy ourselves incapable of running it entirely over. We therefore enter upon it, because we are of good will; but we form a plan to ourselves, agreeable to our actual weakness, to which

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we mean to confine ourselves, without going farther.

This is a gross error, that proceeds partly from ignorance, partly from self-love, which is attentive to its convenience, and partly also from the devil who is jealous of our progress. We ought to reflect, that our strength has no other principle than grace ; that we shall grow strong in proportion as we are faithful ; that God always measures the greatness of his helps by the greatness of the difficulties : so that, the more we advance, the greater is our ardour to run, and the more easily are the obstacles overcome. What should we say of a child, who, not reflecting that his strength will insensibly increase with age, should proportion, to his present weakness, the burden, which he is to carry, when he becomes a man, and would not believe, that he then could carry twenty times more ?

Whosoever therefore you be, who mean to give yourself to God, give your-

yourself to him wholly and entirely. Do not enter into any composition with him. Have no other fear, than that of not being generous enough. Be persuaded, that the smallest reserve would weaken you, even in those things which you freely engage in ; and that, on the contrary, your burden will be so much the lighter, as you reject the diminution of it.

This can seem a paradox only to him, who does not consider, that God displays all the power of his grace, in favour of a noble and generous soul that spares no pains to please him ; and that a narrow and contracted heart induces him to be also sparing.

It is not to my purpose to explain, in the detail, what it is to have no reserve with God, or what kinds of reserve, open or hidden, mix with most devotions : I should exceed the narrow limits of this work. Practice will teach

teach those, who are of good will, more, than what I could say.

XIII.

True devotion admits of no division. *The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and him only shalt thou serve**. Such is the law of a proper consecration. The adoration, which comprehends the homage of the mind and of the heart, excludes all reserve; and the service, which belongs only to God, excludes all vision. Every other service, besides his, is only lawful, in as much as it flows from and depends upon his service. Jesus Christ has declared, that *no one can serve two masters*†, such as God and the world, whose wills are contrary, whose laws are opposite, and consequently their service is incompatible. God will have me totally to himself; the world also wants me totally to itself. There is no possibility of reconciling

* Matt. iv. 10.

† Matt. vi. 24.

their

their pretensions, which mutually clash and destroy each other. I therefore must make a choice ; and if I love the one, I must hate the other : if I obey one, I must despise the orders of the other.

How is it possible to mis-apprehend so palpable a truth ? And yet almost all, who aim at devotion, undertake to reconcile the interests of God with those of the world ; they pretend to unite, in the same heart, the love of God and the love of the world ; and, by wishing to belong to both, they belong to neither. We might say of all such what the prophet Elias said to the Israelites : *How long do you hait between two fides ? If the Lord be God, follow him ; but if Baal, then follow him**.

They fancy, that they no longer side with the world, because they have renounced what is criminal, and evi-

* 3 Kings xviii. 21.

dently dangerous in it. They are no longer slaves to voluptuousness, which is the chief divinity of the world ; but they are still enthralled by interest and false honor. They follow, with regard to these two objects, the maxims which are reprobated by the gospel, by setting a value on riches, on nobility, on dignities, on whatever elevates and distinguishes them ; by loving or desiring those things, either for themselves, or those who belong to them ; by envying them in others, and by using every endeavour either to preserve or to acquire them. On a thousand occasions, they adopt the judgments of the world, and square their conduct by them. They are jealous of its esteem, and are afraid of losing it, by declaring themselves too openly in favor of piety ; they preserve it, at the expence of virtue, in spite of the reproaches of their conscience, They dread its censure and railleries, and they so contrive, as to be screened from them : the

the service of God suffers by it ; they are hampered and violently drawn to both sides ; human respect shackles and keeps them continually in mortal agonies. They wish to belong to God, and blush at being thought to belong to him. They pray to him by stealth ; and as carefully conceal themselves, in the discharge of their duties of piety, as if they were doing some bad action. What a slavery ! What a torment ! But, at the same time, what an infidelity, what a cowardice, what an inconsistency !

Is this being devoted to God ? Does he then deserve only to be served in private ? Is it a shame to acknowledge him for our master ? They do not chuse to post themselves, they say. If, by posting themselves, they mean to make parade of their devotion, to display it with pomp and ostentation, to seek to be seen and applauded in the good works they do ; they are in the right, and they observe the precept of

of the gospel*. But between posting one's self in this manner, and trembling through fear of being looked upon as a servant of God, as one who is devoted to the glory and the interests of so great and so good a master, there is a medium, which consists in going on freely and frankly in our duties, without taking heed whether we be noticed or not; in following uprightly the dictates of our conscience; in paying to God, without affectation, but always openly, the homage, which he expects from us, for his own glory, and for the edification of our neighbour; and in doing in secret only such things which he chuses we should conceal from others†.

The truly devout man well knows how to keep this medium. He is under no concern, that it should be known that he serves God with all his heart, and that he holds the world in

* Matt. vi. 18. † Matt. vi. 18.

contempt and abhorrence. He plainly delivers his sentiments on that head, when and where it is necessary, and where he ought to trample under foot all human respect. But he is not less careful, to conceal some practices of piety, some kinds of good works, to which he chuses that God alone should be witness. Thus does he reconcile what Jesus Christ says: * *So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.* And what he says in another place: † *When you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, that love to stand and pray in the synagogues and corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men.—But enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret.* He has always in his mind the sentence which our Saviour pronounced: ‡ *Every one that confess*

* Matt. v. 16. † Matt. vi. 5.

‡ Matt. x. 32.

me before men, I will also confess him before my Father: but he that shall deny me before men, I will also deny him before my Father.

I know, that there are cases in which prudence authorises caution; that a feeble virtue should not expose itself too openly, or brave human respect too bodily, at the hazard of yielding to the assaults that might be made upon it. I know, that the deference which is due to a father, to a husband, to a master who may be unfavorable to piety, requires that we should carefully hide from them, what might offend or irritate them. This was the practice among the primitive Christians, in their domestic persecutions. To preserve grace, they did not discover themselves, either to their parents, their masters, or their heathenish friends: the brother shunned the eye of his brother who was watching him, the wife the eye of her husband, and,

in general, the faithful the eye of the unbeliever.

But when we are responsible to no one for our actions, when the most we have to fear is the vain censure of worldlings, we should not hesitate to bid it defiance, boldly to stand up, and openly to declare what we are, and what we mean to be. Are the partisans of the world afraid to shew themselves ? Were we ourselves afraid, when we were of that number ? The best way is absolutely to break off from the world in heart and affection, to assume a manner of seeing, judging, speaking and of acting quite contrary to that of the world, and to have no other connexions with it, than those, that are indispensable, and compatible with the most delicate piety : and in other respects to renounce its commerce, its pleasures, its esteem, to be above its censures ; to be well pleased, like the Apostles*, and all the true

* Acts v. 41.

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disciples of Jesus Christ, that it should criticise, blame, despise, calumniate and persecute us.

Our consecration exacts of us these dispositions, and it will place them in us, if it be sincere. When once, in good earnest, we shall have taken this resolution, the reward will soon follow even in this life. We shall be loosed from many shackles: we shall be outwardly free, and inwardly peaceable; God will be satisfied; our conscience will not reproach us; and the world itself will admire and approve of the contempt which we have for it.

XIV.

True devotion belongs to every age and to every condition; it extends to every situation and to every action in life.

As soon as a Christian attains to the first use of reason, he is bound to consecrate to God the thoughts of his mind, and the budding affections of his heart. Of these first fruits, God is

the most jealous ; right order demands, that the consecration of infancy should be the fruit of the first developing of the soul. In that happy age, in which all is candor and innocence, the more the mind is disengaged from prejudices, the more the heart is free from passions, the more the conscience is pure, the more also are children susceptible of a sincere, tender, simple, and ingenuous piety. * *Suffer the little children to come unto me*, said Jesus Christ : they are unacquainted with any malice ; the world has not seduced nor perverted them ; they are free from all stain ; their infant soul is flexible to all the motions of grace ; the kingdom of heaven is so adapted to them, that in a more advanced age, in order to enter into it, we must draw as near as possible to the state of infancy,

* *Mark x. 14.*

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Ye young hearts, give yourselves therefore to God, and correspond with his sweet invitations. You are affected by the carefes of a father and of a mother ; make a trial of the carefes of your heavenly Father. It is to you particularly, that it is said ; *Taste and see, how sweet the Lord is**. Let yourselves be early inebriated with his divine love, which will preserve you from the flattering, but envenomed, liquor, which the world will one day set before you.

Parents, and those who have the charge of children, cannot bend them too soon to the yoke of the Lord. It is a good thing to have carried it from the earliest years ; the soul then is easily fashioned to it ; and should it, in future, unfortunately shake it off, it will more readily take to it again.

The more extensive the light is of our reason, the less are we excusable

*Psal. xxxiii. 9.

in refusing to dedicate ourselves to God. The passions, it is true, begin to be noisy ; and their tumultuous clamors tend to drown the voice of grace ; but they are easily silenced, or, at least, it is easy to preserve the heart from their seduction ; pious practices, good books, good instructions and examples, and a frequent use of the sacraments will baffle all their attempts.

The age of manhood, when reason is in its vigor, the heart more consistent, and the character more settled, would be the fittest for grace to act upon the soul, to incline it to devotion, if the cares of life, the thorns of ambition, and bad habits, formerly contracted, were not obstacles. But there is no obstacle, which an upright mind, and a resolute will, may not overcome. And what plausible pretext can a Christian find, to authorise his neglect of devoting himself to God, in that period of life, in which he sees,

more

more clearly than ever, the necessity and the advantages of so doing ? If he be then more seriously taken up with his temporal concerns, is it not just and prudent for him, to think on that permanent settlement, which his labour ought to procure for him in heaven ; and to direct to that object, which is the only interesting one, all his projects, and all his steps ?

In old age, when extinct passions leave the mind in possession of its lights, and no longer cross the determinations of the will : when experience has unmasked the chasm and illusion of the scene of the world ; when objects make but a faint impression on the enfeebled senses, when infirmities and caducity warn us of an approaching dissolution, and that we are on the brink of eternity ; every thing invites and presses us to give to God the last moments at least of our life ; and repair, as far as can be, by a fervent and solid piety, the loss of so many years, which

which we had employed in shameful, and perhaps criminal, purposes. There is no more time for a delay ; death accelerates its pace ; it will be too late, when the last sickness surprises us.

The levity of infancy, the heat of youth, the private and public occupations of riper years, the debility of old age cannot be considered as motives for dispensation, or any kind of excuse. Nothing more can be concluded, than that every age has its difficulties, and that, in every stage of life, if we mean to belong to God, we must offer violence to ourselves.

XV.

The same judgment should be formed of conditions. Each one has a side favorable, and one contrary to devotion ; and none has any just cause to plead exemption. Grandeur has its dangers for salvation, which no one can be preserved from, without God's special protection, and no one can expect more, than that this protection should

should hold pace with his devotion: Public employments bring on great obligations, and expose us to great temptations: how can we expect to discharge those duties, and overcome those temptations, without a solid devotion? Cares and occupations may multiply, and hardly leave room for leisure; but if the heart be with God, we shall find ourselves free in the midst of all those hurries, which will become so many occasions of testifying our obedience and our love.

How many have sanctified themselves in a military life, in which the obstacles seem unsurmountable? How many in the magistracy? How many even intrusted with the public funds? I except some certain conditions, which in themselves are contrary to salvation, which are proscribed by the gospel, which no one is obliged to engage in, and which are only tolerated in well regulated governments. But such excepted, I boldly advance, that there

there is not one, in which there have not been, and actually are, saints. Would God, the author of the diverse conditions in society, have established any one, in which it were morally impossible to be saved? - If in some of them there are greater difficulties, he has annexed to them greater helps; and all those who have given up themselves to his conduct, have happily experienced it.

Devotion also embraces every situation; it is equally beneficial, equally necessary in health and in sickness, in prosperity and in adversity, in opulence and in indigence, in joy and in sadness, in the good things of this life and in the evils of it; that we may guard against an abuse of the former, and be enabled to support the latter; and as these are incomparably more common here below, than those, and as all human resources are frequently insufficient, it follows that devotion and submission to the holy will of God are the

the only solid comfort, which a Christian can find, amidst the afflictions and crosses which fall to his share.

Finally, devotion, of its own nature, extends itself to every action; and there is none which it is not calculated to sanctify. It would not be a perfect dedication, did it not subject to God's dominion whatever can be subjected to it. Now, such are all our free actions, which are otherwise called human actions. It is God's intention that they all should be referred to him, and that they should be done for his glory. And therefore whosoever is truly devout, consecrates them all to him without exception, and through this consecration he sanctifies them. He knows that where a rational being is to act according to reason, a Christian should act according to religion; that it is not sufficient to act in the state of grace, but that he moreover ought to act through a principle of grace: as, in order to act

reasonably, it is not enough for a man to have the use of reason, unless he applies it to what he actually does. This principle, which is incontestably truth, will lead us a great way, if we take pains to examine it.

It therefore is a mistake to fancy ourselves devout, because we daily acquit ourselves, almost by rote of a certain number of pious exercises, whilst in other respects we live in dissipation, and admit, without constraint, all kinds of thoughts, actions and desires, provided they have nothing in them that is criminal. God, at this rate, would only be attended to at some certain times in the day, and the rest would be at our own disposal. But the case is not so: all our moments belong to him; he will have us employ them in a manner that is worthy of himself, and of the profession we make of being Christians; we are not at liberty to dispose of them at pleasure; to waste them, for instance in visits, in frivolous

lous conversations, in books of mere amusement, or in a slothful indolence. The duties of our state of life, labour, and some short relaxation that may be allowed to nature, ought to fill up the voids of the day ; nothing ought to interrupt that continual prayer of the heart, which Jesu Christ and the Apostle have recommended to us. The design of the prayers which we perform at stated times, is to draw down the blessing of God upon our actions, in which his grace is so much the more necessary, the more we are exposed to dissipation, the more we are inclined to act in a manner that is merely human, and to commit many faults which often escape our notice.

XVI.

LOVE alone can produce this devotion. It is love that gives it birth, increases and perfects it ; and the practice of devotion nourishes and strengthens love. We may define devotion : The love of God reduced to practice.

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What

What would that devotion be, that should not principally proceed from the love of the object to which we devote ourselves? And, if a man cannot be devoted to his fellow man, but in as much as he gives him his affection, warmly espouses his interest, eagerly seeks every occasion of obliging and pleasing him, spares neither his rest, health, property, nor even his life; how much more affectionate, more quick, more ardent and generous ought the sentiments of a soul to be that is devoted to God?

When he commands us to love him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, does he not equivalently command us to be entirely devoted to him? Devotion is literally the practice of the great precept of the love of God; what is deficient in devotion, is deficient in the observance of this precept; and we may apply to devo-

devotion what is said of charity, that it is the fulfilling of the law*.

Hence perfect devotion banishes fear, as well as perfect charity. Devotion is the character of children, as fear is that of slaves. Fear sees in God a master, a judge, an avenger, and serves him in that respect ; devotion sees in him a father whom it fears, respects and obeys, because it loves him. Fear may dispose a soul to become devout, but it does not make it such ; and as soon as it becomes such, not fear, but love prevails. Now love, wherever it prevails, aims at absolute empire, and banishes fear, which is in opposition to it. For fear springs from self-love, which is the enemy of the love of God, and the scourge of devotion.

What then is to be the thought of those who serve God through the fear of being lost, who are only struck with the terrible truths of religion, and are

* Rom. xiii. 10.

continually congealed with fright ? To whom are they devoted ? Is it to God ? No : they are devoted to themselves, and to their own interest. Why do they dread sin ? Is it because it offends God ? By no means : is it because God punishes it. Why do they fear hell ? Is it on account of the pain of loss, or the eternal privation of God ? Not at all ; the pain of sense, the eternal flames, is that alone which terrifies them.

Let us not however confound the terror which originates from a lively and weak imagination, and which the heart disavows, with the fear which proceeds from mean and servile sentiments. Many people who are truly devout are subject to this terror, which is their torment, and which they find great difficulty to overcome ; but it lessens in proportion as they advance in devotion, and at last it totally disappears. It is not uncommon that after they have been terrified all their life time

time at the judgments of God, they die in peace, confidence and security.

XVII.

For the same reason true devotion is not mercenary or interested. At first indeed when God lavishes upon it his sweets, it is rather too much attached to them; it looks for them, and they are one of the motives of its fidelity. But it soon lifts itself above these carefesses; and when God has weaned it from them, it does not serve him with less zeal and exactness. The devout soul, on entering its career, becomes an infant; God treats it like an infant; it would not be fair to ascribe to it mercenary views, as in that state consolations are its attractive and incitement.

With regard to salvation, let the progress which the soul has made in devotion be what it will, it always desires it, and with horror rejects an indifference to this essential object; but it desires it less on its own account, than

than on account of God. It wishes its happiness ; and how could it not wish it ? But it wishes still more the glory of God, and the accomplishment of his holy will. It serves him like David, on account of the reward* ; but that is only a secondary motive ; the first and the principle is love. He who loves purely, views the object he loves with a direct eye, without glancing at his own interest. He does not exclude it, and he even cannot exclude it, because he places his happiness in the possession of what he loves. But he does not establish his end in this possession, in as much as it renders him happy ; he establishes it in the glory, which results from it to God, and in the fulfilling of his will.

I shall not expatiate further on the delicacy and the extreme purity of the Divine love. But if we attentively reflect on the qualities of the devotion

* Psal. cxviii. 112.

which

which has God for its object, we shall comprehend how free it ought to be from every interested view. I know not what pitch it reaches to upon earth in some privileged souls ; they only can tell. But it is certain that no interested views, or self-satisfaction can dwell in the abode of the blessed ; and it is that which completes their felicity. A truth which is incomprehensible to self-love ; a truth which throws it into desolation and despair, because it cannot form an idea of a happiness, in which it has no share, and from which it is totally excluded.

All devotion, if it be solid, and if love be the principle of it, aims at this admirable purity of views of the inhabitants of heaven ; and, if it cannot attain to it, it strives at least to approach it. Let us examine if ours be such. Let us not be afraid of sounding the motives of it ; and with the help of grace let us labour to purify them. To the fear of being lost, let us substitute

tute the fear of losing God ; to the interested desire of saving ourselves, let us substitute that of possessing God, and of being eternally united to him. At bottom it is the same thing ; the object does not change ; but the manner of viewing it is very different ; and it is this difference of aspects and of motives which gives to devotion diverse degrees of excellency and perfection.

XVIII.

AFTER what has been said, what becomes of all those devotions of which self-love is the basis ? How false, how deceitful are they ! and yet how common ! I do not speak of that gross self-love which is the parent of passions and vices. I speak of a spiritual self-love which slips into pious practices, of a self-love which has also its capital vices, which is proud, avaricious, envious, voluptuous, greedy, vindictive and slothful ; which is not less blind, and of which the danger is

so much the greater, as the objects, to which it is attached, are holy.

In fact, are those devout people very rare who now nourish a secret pride, and who, like the Pharisee in the gospel, are full of self-esteem, and of contempt for their neighbour ; who appropriate to themselves the graces and the gifts of God, and dread nothing so much as their being stripped of them ; who bear envy to those whom they think to be more favoured, or more advanced ; who relish with passion heavenly consolations ; who are greedy of them and insatiable ; who are passionate, full of hatred, gall and malice ; the whole, as they imagine through a zeal for God's cause ; in short, who are given to remissness, laziness, idleness, and to all that is flattering to nature ?

I own that in the beginning, and even in the progress of a spiritual life, we are more or less liable to these excesses, on account of our natural imperfection

perfection. Self-love finding itself deprived of temporal comforts, on entering into the path of piety, has recourse to those which are spiritual ; it seizes them and makes them its prey, by adhering to them so much the more strongly, as they are of a more excellent nature. But the truly devout man constantly labours to oppose it, to pursue it from place to place, and to dislodge it from every quarter where it may take refuge. This warfare is his main object, and he thinks that he falls from his duty, in proportion as he relaxes or grows faint in his attacks. As the spirit of religion detaches a man from things temporal, the spirit of devotion detaches him from a self-love in things spiritual ; it does not allow him to take complacency in them, or to ascribe them to himself, or to usurp the property of them ; it leads him by degrees to renounce, to divest himself of, and to be in perfect poverty with regard to such objects. He has all, and is attached

tached to nothing. God gives and takes, when and as he pleases, and he neither rejoices nor repines.

The opposite vices do not shew themselves at first, on account of their subtilety; but in proportion as we advance, divine grace teaches us to discover them; and all our fidelity consists in drawing down upon us this grace, in receiving it with gratitude, and in using it for our amendment. It will cost us long and painful efforts; we stand in need of great courage; we must use extreme violence to ourselves before we can entirely unroot these delicate views; it is the work of our whole life. But at last, if we correspond with grace, we shall effect it, and shall free ourselves, as much as possible, from the tyranny of self-love. God, who sees our good-will, by sending us merciful trials, will accomplish what of ourselves we could not compass.

XIX.

DEVOTION, being the child of love, is parent to confidence ; for the more we love God, the more we confide in him : the one is the rule and the measure of the other. The love of God is not a blind love, but a love which is founded on the knowledge of his infinite goodness towards his creatures. And it is this knowledge which leads us to rely on him in all our concerns, never to be mistrustful of him ; to believe that he means to save us, and that in fact he will save us, if we preserve our confidence. *Throw yourself into his arms*, says St. Austin, *he will not withdraw himself that you may fall to the ground*. I add to the thought of that holy Doctor, that should he seem some times to withdraw himself, it is because he means to try you, and to see how far your confidence will go, in order to increase your reward. As this virtue is that which honours him the most, it is also that which he exercises the most,

and

and with regard to strong and generous souls, he pushes the trial to the greatest extremities.

Confidence stands between two opposite vices, presumption and pusillanimity, both which proceed from the same source ; that is to say, self-love. We are presumptuous, when we rely too much on ourselves. We are pusillanimous, when, relying only on ourselves, we feel how weak our support is. The presumptuous man says, Nothing shall ever shake me. The pusillanimous says on the contrary : the least puff will overset me. The confident, considering himself, says with the pusillanimous that a trifle can overset him ; but considering God, he adds, that nothing is capable of shaking him. He thus unites both sentiments, which being separately vicious, are a virtue when joined together.

Nothing is more necessary, or more frequently in use, than confidence in the career of devotion. God delights

in exercising our faith : he forces us to shut our eyes, and to walk in the dark ; he bewilders us in appearance, so that we no longer know where we are, or whither we are going. He makes us lose footing, and takes from us all knowledge of our interior, forbids us all reflection on ourselves, and if we look out for any assurance, he leaves us a prey to the keenest anxiety. Why does he thus deal with us ? To force us to renounce the conduct of ourselves, and to give up ourselves entirely to him.

What would become of faith, and what use would it be of, were we always clearly to see the state of our soul, were we informed of the reasons, for which God wills or permits the events, which befall us from one moment to another, and were we to trace step by step the way and the progress of his operations ?

The confidence of a blind man in him who guides him, is grounded on his

his not being able to see ; it is great in proportion as the road through which he is led is unknown to him, as he thinks it is dangerous, and surrounded with precipices ; and still as he shews no solicitude, as he makes no enquiries, as he is confident of not being misled, and of being safely conducted to his journey's end.

On our devoting ourselves to God, our confidence in him should be boundless. To withdraw it under any pretence whatever is to resume ourselves, and to become our own conductors. To fix it within certain limits which we are determined not to exceed, is to have a reserve in our devotion. Now nothing is more injurious to God, or more prejudicial to our spiritual profit. Is it not to doubt of the goodness of God, or of his infinite power, to believe either that he will not, or cannot rescue us from all the difficulties, and from the greatest dangers in which we engage ourselves upon his word, and

through a blind submission to his guidance ? It is absolutely impossible that God should be wanting to us, and that he should not succour us opportunely : he would be wanting to himself. But it belongs to him alone to judge how far the trial is to go, and to mark the precise moment in which he will come to our relief. Let us, therefore, give up ourselves to him, and let us say with Job, *Though he even should kill me, I will hope in him**.

XX.

DEVOTION does not lead less to the knowledge of one's self than to that of God ; and as confidence is the fruit of the knowledge of God, humility is also the fruit of the knowledge of one's self.

Man does not know, and cannot know himself well by his natural light alone ; and it is the want of this knowledge that makes him proud. But as

* Job. xiii. 15.

soon as he devotes himself to God, a heavenly light shines upon him, and opens his eyes ; he begins to see himself such as he is, full of miseries, weak, repugnant to all that is good, and prone to all that is evil. Recollection rendering him attentive to himself, soon teaches him that he has two men within himself, of which the one is an enemy to the other ; that a spiritual life is but a series of combats which he must engage in, and of violence to himself. Experience instructs him still better. One effaying, he knows how difficult it is to overcome himself, to struggle against his evil inclinations ; how much time and labour it costs him to correct the swallest of the faults with which he swarms ; how painful the practice of virtue is, let the love which he has conceived for it be what it will ; what resistances he makes to grace ; into what slothfulness, negligences, infidelities he falls daily ; how frail his will is, how weak his resolutions, how fruitless his best

best desires; what power the world, the flesh, and the devil have over him; and that, without a special and continual assistance from God, he would fall at every instant.

This experimental knowledge of himself, joined to the lights which he receives from above, inspires him with humility, which is nothing else but the sentiment and the intimate conviction of that unhappy fund of corruption which each one of us brings into the world, which age and occasions unfold, and which is the bud of our passions and vices. The more he advances, the stronger is this conviction, and humility roots deeper in his heart.

From hence springs that contempt of himself, that salutary diffidence of his own strength, that sincere preference which he gives to others over himself, believing them to be better than he is, or at least doubting that, if they had received the same graces, they would have made a better use of them.

them. From hence also arises that confusion which he feels at the sight of God's favours, of the esteem and respect which are shewn him, of the praises which are giving him. All this, instead of elevating him, debases and vilifies him in his own eyes. If he reflects on himself, it is to humble himself the more : he sees not his virtues, he is ignorant of his progress, to God alone he attributes his victories, and his failings to himself.

XXI.

TRUE devotion, of its own tendency, walks in the most simple and ordinary path : it follows the beaten track, and shuns by-ways. It abhors singularity, lest it should be noticed and observed ; its disposition is to hide itself, and to mix with the crowd. A friend to those virtues and practices which shine the least, and which upon that account are the more solid, it prefers them to all others. It is the lowly and timid violet, that dares

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not openly produce itself, and suffers itself to be trodden upon under the grass that covers it. Exclusive of what is due to example and edification, it carefully conceals its conduct from the knowledge of others.

All is natural about it; it has no shew or affection. Far from wishing for heavenly gifts, it thinks itself unworthy of them; and constantly prays God that he would do nothing in its regard that may attract the attention of men, and lift it to any distinction; it is not envious of those saints who have signalized themselves by miracles, who have had visions, revelations, the gift of prophecy, and other singular graces which made them the wonder of their age. It admires, it reveres those in whom such gifts were conspicuous; but for its own share it chuses obscurity, contempt, ignominy, to be set at nought, to be known but from its failings, or to be totally unknown and forgotten.

The good works, which men are
apt

apt to observe, are not of its choice : it prefers those which have God alone for witness. It enjoins secrecy to those people whom it befriends, and hides from them, as much as it can, the source of its benefactions. It could wish to hide it from itself, and that its left hand knew not what the right hand did : it loses the remembrance of it, and would think it a crime to dwell upon it, or to be placed with it.

Devout people, of this character, are so rare, that one might think that I have been drawing a fancy picture. However there are some of that stamp, and because they have nothing about them that distinguishes them, they are thought to be more rare than they really are. As to the others, in many of them you only see singularity, affectation and ostentation. They are peculiar in their air, their look, their dress, their language and their conduct. Some of them aim at extraordinary kinds of prayer ; they use
vain

vain efforts to that purpose ; their imagination seduces them, the devil deceives them, and pride takes possession of them. They must have practices and prayers for themselves alone, they would disdain to unite their voices with that of the people to sing the praises of the Lord.

How many devout persons are there, who have fixed places at the Church, as if in perspective, which favour their desire of distinction as well as of convenience ? Observe how they pray, how much their exterior is studied, cramped and forced.

Who would imagine, that so refined a pride could thus insinuate itself into piety ? Who could imagine, that people dedicated themselves to God only to seek themselves ; that they aimed at sanctity only to have the reputation of it ; and that they placed all the fruit of virtue in applauding themselves for it, and in being applauded for it by others ?

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I do not say, that this kind of devotees are all hypocrites, or that these characters are applicable to each one of them in their full force. But I say, and it is true, that very few ground their devotion on humility ; that pride, the most subtile of all vices, is that of which we are the least diffident ; that it is, without comparison, the most dangerous ; that no other vice is so apt to blind us : that it is the most profoundly rooted in the heart of man, the most difficult to fight against, and the last to be extirpated. I say, that it is more to be apprehended, by those who make profession of great piety, than by others, because it chiefly fastens on virtue ; that it is properly the moth of it, that eats and corrupts it ; that we cannot guard too much against it ; and that, if we expel it from one place, it immediately enters into another.

Would we know what is the touchstone of true devotion ? It is the love

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of humiliations. He who sincerely desires them, who makes them the great object of his prayers, who accepts of them with an interior joy, notwithstanding the reluctance of nature, who thanks God for them, who looks upon them as the most precious blessing, who does nothing to be freed from them; who is well pleased in the thought that his faults are made known, that his failings are exposed, that his virtues are cried down, his reputation aspersed; and who, contrary to the will of God, would not utter a word in his own justification: such a one as this is truly devout, and the perfect disciple of Jesus Christ. Now I ask, are there many who are truly devout? Can we rank ourselves amongst them? Let each one give answer to himself; and let him be assured, that he is as little advanced in devotion, as he feels himself remote from that perfection.

XXII. Devo-

XXII.

Devotion is not less friendly to mortification than it is to humility; and, in reality, humility is the main branch of mortification, as it has for object the destruction of self-esteem, and the love of our own excellence. The other two objects are, the destruction of the inordinate affection which we have for our bodies, and the natural propensity which leads us to do our own will in all things, and to refer every thing to ourselves.

He, who is truly devout, is not more indulgent to himself in these two last articles, than he is in the first. He knows, that mortification is what God chiefly demands of him. For prayer is more the work of God than his own. Now all devotion is comprised in the practice of prayer and of mortification. The more progress we make in the one and the other, the more devout we are; and reciprocally. There is then a division made between God

and the soul that is devoted to him ; God, in general, takes care of prayer, and the soul is to attend to mortification : not but what God interferes in mortification, as well as the soul cooperates with prayer ; but prayer is principally the work of grace, and mortification that of the will.

The mortification of the flesh is indispensable, for two principal reasons ; the first of which is, that the inordinate love of our body, the inclination to sensual pleasures, and the aversion to pain are the source of innumerable sins ; and the second is, that *the sensual, or the carnal man perceiveth not those things that are of the spirit of God**, and has no relish for them.

Hence it is that, when a soul dedicates itself to God, an impulse towards exterior mortification is the first thing with which he inspires it. Those who

* 1 Cor. ii. 14.

are indifferent, or remiss on this head, are not truly devout. In the heat of the first fervor, most are apt to exceed in this particular, and would go too great lengths, were they not restrained by the advice of a prudent director.

That which is essential in it is, never to allow ourselves any thing, merely with the view of gratifying our senses ; never to go in search of any pleasure, even innocent, because it ceases to be so, the moment we attach ourselves to it, and relish it for its own sake ; so to regulate that which it is proper to grant to the exigencies of our body, as not to exceed the bounds of what is sufficient. And as those bounds have no determinate measure, to avoid perplexity and uneasiness on that head, we should earnestly pray to God, that he himself would direct us, and follow with great docility the lights he will give us. In this point, as well as in all others of a similar na-

ture, God grants the spirit of wisdom and of discretion to all those who ask for it, and who are of good will.

Nothing can dispense from this kind of mortification, which should rather be termed temperance and sobriety. But it is not so with regard to austerities. Age, or delicacy of constitution are just motives for dispensation : great labour of mind or body may supply their place ; there are even times in a spiritual life in which God permits hardly any, and the soul, under its trials, is left destitute of this support. He who is truly devout is determined to do, in this respect, whatever he shall know to be the will of God ; and, to avoid mistake, he will take advice. There are whole treatises on this matter, the detail of which, I omit.

XXIII.

The mortification of the will is by far more important, more extensive, and, in practice, more difficult than that

that of the flesh. It knows no bounds nor exceptions: it never should be suspended, and there is no danger of carrying it too far. Were I to expose here all the kinds of destructions, through which the will must pass, in order to be absolutely lost in the will of God, and to be made one and the self-same thing with his will, it would be the matter of a long treatise. I shall content myself to say, that such destructions or deaths are different according to God's designs, and of which an idea can hardly be formed, until they are experienced.

Remember, that to be devout, is to be devoted to God, and consequently to have no will but his in all things. I say in all things: and God only knows how far that should extend, since the creature, by devoting itself, gives him back its will, that he may dispose of it at pleasure. For this purpose, therefore, the creature must resolve to die to its will, and to second God,

God, in all that he shall do or permit, with the view of destroying it.

Do not however be alarmed before hand, nor give scope to your imagination about things that perhaps never happen. Wait in peace for the manifestation of God's designs : foresee nothing, fear nothing, reject nothing, nor yet offer yourself for any thing in particular. Leave all to him : he is infinitely wise : he sees the most secret springs of your will, and he knows how to bring it round to his purposes. He will begin with those things which are the most easy ; he will gradually lead you to others that will cost you more ; and, in this manner, he will bring you, if he thinks proper, to the greatest sacrifices. But he will dispose of every thing with so much force and sweetness, he will prepare your will in such a manner, that it always will incline to a less resistance, and at last it will almost lose the faculty of resisting him. Whatever you can

can give him through your free consent, he will gently engage you to grant ; and that which will not be in your power to grant, he will induce you to allow him to take, in virtue of the absolute offering you have made to him of yourself.

Such is the plan which God generally follows. He solicits the soul to give a general and indistinct consent to all that he shall chuse to ordain, When once this consent is given, he unfolds his particular intentions, either by means of the events of his providence, or by the unforeseen circumstances in which he places the soul, or by the temptations and trials to which he exposes it ; he proportions his graces and helps to each situation ; and the soul has nothing else to do but to yield accordingly to the will of God. At first, it conforms itself with reluctance, and after many struggles ; then with a ready submission, at last with joy. It arrives at the pitch of no

no longer feeling any interior resistance to any thing whatever, of no longer despising any thing, of no longer fearing any thing, of being holily indifferent to every thing, provided the will of God be accomplished. It has then reached to the highest degree of conformity, because its will is not only united to God's will, but it is one and the same thing with his.

This is the term of interior mortification, which is also that of devotion. If it do not tend thither, it is no longer a dedication, or it is a very imperfect one. Let us humble ourselves, and be confounded. Perhaps we fancy ourselves devout, and we have not as yet a just idea of devotion. *Those who belong to Jesus Christ, says St. Paul, have crucified their flesh;* * they have fastened it to the cross, at the example of their master. Is our flesh cruci-

* Galat. v. 24.

fied as that of Christ was, I do not say during his passion, but throughout the whole course of his life ? *Those who belong to him, says the same Apostle, live not now to themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again**. Have we got to that pass ? Do we labour to attain to it ? Is Jesus Christ our life ? Is his will ours ? Do we conceive what it is to live no longer for ourselves, but for Jesus Christ ?

St. Ignatius, on going to his martyrdom, said, *I begin to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.* The love of his master was consuming him ; he was burning with the desire of being ground in the jaws of wild beasts : he durst not say, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ ; but, I begin to be so : I am only in the first elements ; and, what he said, he sincerely thought. And we imagine, that we do enough, that we even do more than enough for Jesus Christ ;

* 2 Cor. v. 15.

we fancy ourselves almost at perfection ! Once more let us humble ourselves. The saints thought very differently of devotion from what we do. They did not flatter themselves, that they were devout ; such a title would have shocked their humility ; they were in constant exercise to become so, but considered themselves in their apprenticeship ; even at the end of their career.

XXIV.

Devotion is, uniform and invariable ; it is a permanent adhesion of the heart to God, and is unalterable in all the vicissitudes of a spiritual life. It is always the same in ardities as in consolations, in privation as in fruition, in the trouble of temptations as in the calm of peace, in dereliction as in the favours of a most intimate union. Which ever way God deals with me, says the devout soul, he always is what he is, and deserves at all times equally to be served. My devo-

tion should never alter, because he who is the object of it, is immutable.

It is simple, and has only one intention. God alone is its motto. It studies to purify its motives, by raising itself above every thing, that it may only see God, and his blessed will. It has no double look, on God and on itself. The devout soul sees itself, but in God, and in his good pleasure, which is every thing to it.

It is fervent, that is to say, it is always determined to do and to suffer that which pleases God, let it be ever so painful. For I do not call fervor those transient transports, which a sensible grace produces in the soul. Beginners are apt to be deceived by this: they then think themselves capable of every thing, and they invite God to put them to the trial. But when this sensible effect of grace ceases, they soon change their notions and language, and feel their

whole weakness. True fervour resides in the bottom of the will ; and it subsists as long as the will does not yield to tepidity, to remissness, to heaviness ; as long as it preserves the same ardour, the same courage, the same activity.

It is faithful, by carrying its attention and accuracy to the greatest delicacy, yet without scruple or anxiety ; faithful in little things as in great things ; faithful in what is of perfection, as in what is of obligation ; faithful to the smallest sign, as to the most express commandment. It's principle, item which it never departs, is, that nothing is little in the service of God, whose will alone sets a value on things, and that we cannot better testify our love, than by preventing his pleasure, without waiting for his command.

It is discreet, constantly attentive to guide itself according to the spirit of God ; no ways inconsiderate, imprudent

prudent or excessive: a friend to order, performing every thing in proper time and place; knowing when it should be resolute or condescending to the weakness of others: when it should be exact in its pious practices, and when it shculd relax occasionally in its regularity in behalf of charity.

It does not listen to the imagination, which is the stumbling-block of most pious people, which troubles them, disconcerts them, sets before them a thousand vain fancies, and is always beguiling them into opposite determinations, and leading them into extravagance, caprice, levity and inconstancy. Devotion particularly aims at conquering and despising it. By so doing, it acquires great peace of mind, an evenness of temper which nothing discomposes, a serenity of soul which extends to the exterior, and shews a placid countenance in the most disagreeable circumstances.

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XXV.

It is docile, it is not attached to its own ideas, and readily submits them to those who have authority over it: to them it sacrifices even that which may seem to it to be a conviction and a persuasion, and obeys them in spite of the greatest reluctances; it adheres to no method against their will, and makes no alteration in its conduct without their advice.

It does not judge itself favourably, that it may not be disheartened, nor unfavourably, that it may not become presumptuous: equally on its guard against a false humility, which is never satisfied with its progress, and finds fault with all its actions; and against a false confidence, which applauds itself for whatever it does, and easily presumes on its advancement; it thinks that it is more humble and more safe not to examine itself, or pronounce on its situation; but to allow those to judge of it, who are charged with its conduct,

conduct, and to believe them with equal simplicity, whether they approve or condemn it.

Severe towards itself, true devotion is indulgent to others, in prudently consulting their weaknesses, in taking, for its own share, what is most painful and difficult, and in carrying at all times the heaviest burden.

It is active without eagerness, steady without flowness, grave without affectation, cheerful without dissipation. It is not trifling, scrupulous, restless, rigid or remiss, keeping in every thing the proper medium, and inclining rather to mercy than to justice.

Although zealous for virtue, and always ready to undertake those good works which providence may throw in its way, it does not officiously seek them, but waits for them. It does not offer itself, it does not intermeddle, it does not intrigue, it does not interfere in every thing, as if nothing could

be well done, that was not directed by it. The concerns of others are no object to it ; it makes no enquiry, it has no curiosity, it passes no sentence upon them ; it is with the greatest circumspection that it engages in them, when induced by charity, and then it is indefatigable in procuring success, it employs, for that purpose, all its endeavours and credit ; and yet it is always disposed to desist ; as it rather chuses, that good deeds of that kind should be done by others than by itself.

Its zeal does not consist in incessantly exclaiming with bitterness, against abuses even the most real ; it bewails them before God, and beseeches him to remove them ; but it bears with them, if it be not charged to correct them ; and if it be, it does it with as much meekness and patience, as efficacy ; without hurry, precipitancy or violence. Attentive to its own reformation, it does not set itself

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up as a reformer. It is too much taken up with its own failings, to pay attention to those of others ; either it does not see them, or it excuses them ; or, if it cannot excuse them, it is silent ; or if it speaks of them, it is through a motive of charity, and for the advantage of those who are interested in the matter.

It is a declared enemy to parties, cabals, exclusive associations. Not but what it makes choice of some particulars with whom it may form a holy connexion, and may confidentially converse with them on holy things. But those connexions are the work of grace ; there is no affectation or mystery in them, or any thing that shews a contempt of others, as if they were not worthy to be admitted into its society. Much less does it form parties to give vogue to such a preacher, to such a director, and to raise them, by depressing the others. This party-spirit

spirit characterizes false devotion, and true piety has it in abhorrence.

XXVI.

From what I have been saying, it appears, that the great object of devotion is to reform our character ; and this is what it directly leads us to ; by opening our eyes to see our defects, to which we are but too blind ; by inspiring us with a desire of overcoming them, a courage to attack them, and a hope of conquering them, with the help of grace.

Every one knows, that there is no character so accomplished, which is not liable to some defect ; and even that the best natural qualities are always near to some vice. Meekness degenerates into weakness, into a soft complaisance, into indolence. Resolution exposes us to stiffness, harshness, obstinacy ; the wary soul is often timid, diffident, suspicious ; on the contrary, a resolute soul is bold, presumptuous, rash. It is the same with

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all other qualities, which are seldom pure, but almost always blended with good and bad.

Reason alone will never effect a perfect separation. It is not subtile enough to discern the delicate shades which separate good and bad qualities, nor just enough to hit upon the medium between two extremes, nor has it a sufficient command over itself to be steady in it; much less can it conciliate and match two good qualities which seem opposite to each other. This can only be the work of grace, whose light is infinitely more penetrating and sure, and which, while it enlightens the mind, animates and supports the will in an undertaking, where the question is to mould nature anew.

When I speak of moulding nature anew, it is not to be understood, that the character is changed into an opposite one. The ground work of every character is good, why should grace change

change it? The ground-work therefore remains; but whatever self-love has added to it that is vicious, disappears; and that which is good, is perfected. Each moral quality loses what is superfluous, and acquires what is wanting to it. They blend themselves, and, from their just temperature, perfect virtue results. Moreover devotion renders these moral qualities supernatural, and communicates to them a something that is divine, which ennobles and sanctifies them.

However it must be acknowledged, that the industry of man, though assisted by grace, seldom brings the work to the utmost perfection; and that, in the most holy personages, there generally remains some defect, or some excess, which flows from the primitive character: as it may be remarked in the writings, and in the conduct of a St. Cyprian, a St. Jerom, and of many others.

But

But when God himself undertakes the work, and when, with this view, he takes possession of a soul, and brings it into the interior way; should that soul be faithful, habitual recollection, prayer and severe trials, radically purify it, and make its character pass through the crucible, which leaves no alloy. Such a soul becomes like wax in the hands of the great artificer, who handles and fashions it as he pleases, and gives it impressions which are as profound as they are delicate. In such characters the whole seems to be supernatural; there is nothing human to be seen; no good quality exceeds or trenches on another, but they are all in perfect harmony. Such were St. Austin and St. Francis of Sales. How amiable was their devotion! What charity, what uniformity, what admirable evenness of soul in their life and in their conversation, as well as in their writings!

XXVII.

Devotion is accused of contracting the mind ; those who advance this, are unacquainted with it : they confine their reflections to the trifling and superficial behaviour of some certain people who affect to be devout, and they ascribe to devotion the defects of those, who misunderstand and practise it improperly.

Let us single out any one among those, who consider and practise devotion in the manner in which I have defined and expounded it, and see if it contracts their mind. But where is the necessity for much reflection and argument, to be convinced, that the only source from whence we can draw true, great and just ideas on the objects which are the most interesting to man, is that of devotion, which, to the knowledge it receives from pure and sound reason, adds the most solid, sure and sublime lights of revelation ? Nothing is great but the truth ; and the truth,

truth, is God ; it is whatever comes from God, whatever tends to and terminates in God.

How then can that mind be contracted, which, in matters that are within its reach, and that relate to its duties, makes it a rule with itself to conform its ideas and judgments to the ideas and judgments of God ? Is not God *the Father of lights* ? * Is not the eternal Word, *the true light that enlightens every man coming into the world* ? † And some people will have it, that a mind that takes this light for rule and for guide, becomes narrow and little ! There is no absurdity, no contradiction equal to this.

I say, that devotion instructs us in what is within our reach, and what relates to our duties. For it is not necessary that it should go farther. It proportions itself to the capacity of the simple and ignorant, and gives them

* James i. 17. † John i. 9.

what is sufficient to conduct themselves as they ought. The truly devout man, let the natural extent of his mind and his education be what it will, has always more reason, more good sense, more penetration and exactness, than if he were not so. This is incontestable, and I want no more. But, should a man of great genius, that has been cultivated by an excellent education, give himself to devotion; should he, in his meditations and studies, preserve a serenity of mind that is free from prejudice and passion, seeking but the truth, and seeking it only in God, I maintain, that in his researches, he will penetrate as far as the bounds of his understanding can allow, that he will judge of things the most intricate, and the most delicate, as certainly as it can be expected from a reason which is not infallible; and that his talents will acquire all the display of which they are susceptible.

St. Austin was devout; he knew and

and excellently practised religion. Was his mind contracted? Do we know of any mind that was more extensive, more elevated and more profound? Would he have had so great, so just, so penetrating views, had he confined himself to the study of eloquence and of profane philosophy? Let us judge of it from what he himself relates in his Confessions. Until the age of thirty, he applied himself to all kinds of science, and, with an indefatigable ardor, had sought for truth every where but in religion? Did he find it? Did his unquiet mind rest in it? Did he examine it to the bottom, did he unfold it as he has done since, when, having given himself totally to God, he hardly knew any other book besides the holy scriptures, and when, that he might understand the better, he implored the divine assistance by a continual prayer?

St. Chrysostom was devout. Was devotion hurtful to the brightness of his genius, to his happy talent for eloquence? Did it not contribute to that nobleness of ideas, that justness of good sense, that profoundity of philosophy which we admire in his works, and for which he certainly was not behold-
ing to the lessons of Libanius his mas-
ter. Would he have been so great a
man, had he adhered to that sophist,
who had designed him for his succe-
-sor? Compare the writings of the one
and the other, and then judge. I
could say as much of all the fathers
of the church, who, through devotion,
become the best wits and luminaries
of their age.

Devotion therefore is so far from contracting the mind, that on the con-
trary, it gives all the extension, the
solidity, and the sagacity, of which it
is capable. This will appear evident,
if we consider the objects which be-
long to devotion, the light which it
throws

throws upon other objects, the rules it lays down to judge of them properly, the means which it furnishes, and the obstacles it removes for that purpose. I except the frivolous arts and acquisitions of mere amusement, which it teaches us to despise, or at least forbids us to bestow on them our serious application. This pre-supposed, I ask, if there be any one science that is truly worthy of man, to which devotion, such as I have defined, is not useful, or even necessary, in order to penetrate the true principles, to trace and to un-fold the consequences of it ? I leave this to the reflection of my readers. Let them run over philosophy and all its branches, logic, natural history, metaphysic, morality, ~~œconomics~~, politics, jurisprudence ; and let them say, if there be any one which can be possessed and thoroughly discussed without the science of religion, which is the basis of them all. What is history more than an object of curi-

osity, and a mere exercise of the memory, if you separate it from providence, that prepares the events at a distance, and appoints or permits them for wise and worthy purposes? And what other mind but that which is enlightened by a solid devotion, will be able to view history, in the intimate relation which it always has had, and ever will have to religion? If the great Bossuet had not viewed it in this manner, would his *discourse* be so sublime, so eloquent, so instructive as it is? Would it be the master-piece of the human mind, both for the plan and the execution.

If the truly devout man is to be deemed *narrow-minded*, because he is devout; because he loves God, and fears to offend him; because he respects the Church, its ministers, its commandments, and its decisions; because he is nice and delicate in the management of affairs, and about the means of making a fortune; because he

He has piety, virtue and probity, I have nothing more to say: I cannot hinder those, whose personal interest it is to assert, that black is white, and white is black.

XXVIII.

The same devotion, which extends and rectifies the mind, dilates the heart and ennobles the sentiments. This article wants no more proof than the former. That which contracts the heart, and debases it, is self-love, the passions, the esteem and the love of earthly things. Seek for no other cause of hard-heartedness, of meanness, of injustice and cruelty, than the selfishness with which man wants all for self, refers all to self, and strives to concentrate all in self. You cannot name me a single vice, or a single defect, that does not shoot from that root.

Now, what does devotion aim at? It attacks self-love in its very source, and pursues it to its entire extinction,
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by substituting in its room the love of God, the love of one's neighbour, and the well-regulated love of one's self : by this means, it re-establishes in man his primitive rectitude, it restores order in his affections, it forbids any sentiment that proceeds not from God, and tends not to God ; it communicates to him an amleness, which, raising him above himself, extends his benevolence to all mankind ; it interests him, by superior views to those of humanity, in the happiness or misery of his fellow-creatures : it prompts him to relieve them in distress, and to rejoice at their prosperity, as if it were his own ; it inspires him with a noble disinterestedness, with a modest and compassionate generosity, which are unknown to that pompous benevolence, which is always preceded, accompanied and followed by a glance on self : it restores to him, in short, all the capacity which he received from the Creator, and which only can be

be filled with the divine immensity.

Devotion also turns the stream of the human passions, which mutually jar, wrangle and snatch from each other, the frivolous, and pitiful good things of this world, the enjoyment of which cannot be divided ; it turns I say, the stream of them towards their real object, which alone can satisfy them, and which they all can possess in common ; it teaches them only to love, to hate, to desire and to fear, what God and right reason require, that man should love, hate, fear and desire : a morality, which, if faithfully practised, would banish from the world all manner of crimes, and would drain the source of them in the human heart.

In short, it inspires disgust and contempt for earthly things ; it points out to us their proper destination, which is to supply the transitory wants of this mortal life ; it convinces us that

that they are made for us, and even for the meanest part of ourselves, and that our soul is not made for them ; it sets before this soul the solid, eternal, immutable objects which are worthy of its nature, and proportioned to its desires ; it gives it a relish for them, it makes it ardently wish for the possession of them, and teaches it the purest means of attaining them.

How grand, how noble, how sublime are the sentiments of him, who, through his devotion to God, is penetrated with these truths, and even in any condition of life whatsoever ! For in this respect, devotion levels every condition : and the peasant in his cottage is greater than the monarch in his palace, if he has more piety. Honours and dignities do not puff him up : obscurity and dependence do not degrade him. He is not insolent in prosperity, nor dejected in adversity, nor proud and scornful, like the philosopher, in mediocrity.

diocrit. If, from his rank, he is above other men, he only sees in them his equals, to whom he owes either succour or protection. He looks upon himself as inferior to every one who serves God better than he does ; and, because there is no one who is not, or may not be greater before God than he is, he puts himself, in his heart, in the best place. Should he be in an obscure condition, far from envying those who are conspicuous, he congratulates with himself, and thanks God for it. Yes, he thanks God for being born in indigence ; and if grace spurs him on, he reduces himself to poverty, and even to voluntary mendicity. We have seen it in our days ; and this instance of greatness of soul, to him who knows how to prize it, will not appear to be the least triumph of devotion. If he has masters, it is God whom he respects, whom he loves, and whom he obeys in them ; and there is nothing in their service that debases

debases him in the sight of God. In a word, (for I do not mean to exhaust this subject) if he be truly great, who soars above all that is created, and knows no superior but God alone, truly great is the man, who is truly devout.

XXIX.

It should seem, that there were nothing more wanting to the picture of devotion, and that it even greatly surpassed the idea which is generally formed of it : I mean, however, to add to it a few more touches.

The truly devout man no longer belongs to time. As soon as he consecrates himself to God, he is transported, as it were, to the region of eternity ; he only thinks on eternity, not with fear, but with joy, as his distinction ; he beholds every thing with a reference to eternity : he has constantly in his thoughts these words of a saint : *What is this to eternity ? What is any thing to me which passes away with*

with time ? I only am in this world, as in a place of trial ; I am come into it to serve my apprenticeship to what I am eternally to be employed in. I am destined to love God, and to be for ever happy in the possession of him. This is my end. That uncertain, and, in itself, very small number of days, which is portioned out for me upon earth, is only given me, that I may love God through choice, in order to deserve to love him for ever as my reward. Every thing here below should be to me an exercise of love. But love aspires only to give, to sacrifice, to suffer for the object which it loves. This therefore is all I have to do, this is the employment of all the instants of my life. He whom I love deserves all, and expects all from me. He has loved me with an eternal love, with a love that is totally gratuitous and disinterested ; with a love, to which mine, how excessive soever it may be, can never be compared. As

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the price of his love, he asks for mine ; and if he had not prevented me, had he promised me nothing, there still would be a thousand motives to love him.

The will of God is the only rule of the truly devout man, In all that happens to him, he sees nothing but that ; he only adheres to that ; he blesses it for every thing ; he is always contented, provided it be accomplished. He is intimately persuaded, that God appoints nothing, permits nothing that is not conducive to the advantage of those who love him ; whatever comes from his hand (and every thing comes from it, exclusive of sin) is a blessing to him : and crosses, more than any thing else, on account of the resemblance which they give him with Jesus Christ, the head and model of souls devoted to God.

Every thing helps him to unite himself more and more to him whom he loves : the obstacles turn into means :

means : nothing stops him ; he overcomes, he forces every thing ; he removes every medium that hinders him from joining himself immediately to him, mind to mind, and heart to heart. The divine union is the motive of all his actions, and the centre of all his desires. And therefore whatever he loves, he loves it only in God, and for God.

Let no one from hence believe, as some vainly imagine, that his heart is indifferent or insensible. There is no heart more affectionate, more tender, more compassionate, more generous, more grateful than that of the devout man. His love for his neighbour, is modelled after the infinite love of God, and it is but an extension of that which he has for God. The love of his neighbour is a solid, a delicate, an obliging love : a love which nothing lessens, and which, on the contrary, increases by that which seemingly should extinguish it. This however does not hinder it

being true, in a very proper sense, that God is all to the truly devout man, and that every thing besides is nothing to him ; because God is his only good, and the term of all his affections, which only pass through the creatures to fix themselves in him.

XXX.

But let us see, more in particular, what conduct devotion inspires with regard to our neighbour. For it is this head on which it is the most unjustly attacked ; and therefore it is necessary to vindicate it from its censures.

I therefore say, that, in what regards our neighbour, devotion has all the characters which St. Paul attributes to charity ;* since it is nothing else but the practice of the purest charity. Let us develope those characters : let us apply them to the de-

* 1 Cor. xiii. 49.

vout people whom we may be acquainted with, and let us do justice to those in whom we shall see them shine; notwithstanding some few shades, which human frailty may mix with them.

The devout man then is *patient*; *he bears all things*; *he endures all things*. This endurance is one of the most necessary things in a social life, and that in which he exercises himself the most, because the practice of it is continual, and contributes more than any thing to preserve domestic peace. For it is the most wanted in the heart of families, and with those with whom we habitually live: a husband and a wife with regard to each other; a master with regard to his servants; parents with regard to their children: and, in general, those who live together, or have frequent intercourse with one another, are constantly in the way of shewing their character, their humour, and a thousand little natural defects,

such as they are in themselves. And I venture to say, that it is more easy to be patient on great occasions, when motives of religion, and the fear of offending God sets us on our guard, than to refrain, in many trivial circumstances, from sallies of ill-humour, which are not so carefully attended to, and sufficiently considered in their consequences. Nevertheless the want of endurance is sometimes fatal. The imagination takes heat, and magnifies the smallest faults; the temper is exasperated; a bare repugnance begets an aversion; the parties concerned no longer can see or bear with each other; whatever happens shocks on both sides; from words they proceed to greater lengths, open animosities, and declared enmities. The matter in the beginning was trifling; and the evil at last becomes incurable. It is here where the practice of devotion is of great use, by teaching us to bear with

with the failings of others, as we wish that they would excuse ours.

He is *kind*; always inclined to oblige. His property, his time, his talents, his credit, belong less to himself than to others. At what moment soever you apply to him, whatsoever you may ask, if in his power, he is ready to grant it; he quits every other occupation, even his pious exercises, when the interest of his neighbour demands it. He is a stranger to those vain offers, those excuses and evasions which are so common in the world, whereby, provided that it cost nothing, a great shew of benevolence is set forth, and imposition is masked under the appearance of sincerity. His offers are sincere; he is a slave to his promises; and, when he excuses himself, he does it in such manner, as to convince you that it is truly painful to him, to be unable to grant your petition.

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It is of him alone that it can be said, that *he is not envious*; that he beholds, with as much and more pleasure, the prosperity of others than his own; that he envies neither the talents nor the success of others, nor the applause, nor the rewards they receive. How should he envy that which he desires not for himself? He is the first to acknowledge their merit; to praise it, to produce and to set it forth to the best advantage. He is not even jealous of their virtue, of their holiness, of the graces which God bestows on them, which are the treasures he aspires to; and let what will be his desire of loving God, he wishes that others may surpass him in love. How rare a thing is it to be totally exempt from this so mean a sentiment, and yet so natural to man, from which, devotion alone can set him free.

He says nothing, *he does nothing* *perversely*, giddily or inconsiderately: a dispo-

bisposition most important, and of the greatest consequence in society. Much superior to this in politeness, which only saves the appearances, devotion extends this rule to judgments and to affections, from whence flow all exterior demonstrations, which we cannot at all times command, when we are inattentive to what passes in our interior.

Far from being *puffed up* with the temporal or spiritual advantages which he has over others, the truly devout man pays them no regard, or, if he thinks of them, he only finds in them motives of humiliation ; whereas he, who is not truly devout, is always running a secret comparison between himself and others, to obtain the preference, and to congratulate himself *at not being like the rest of men**. The real devout man tries all he can to forget himself ; and the judgments,

* Luke xviii. 11.

which

which he forms of himself, are full of contempt. This is the most intimate sentiment of his heart.

No one is more *remote* than he from *ambition*. As much as others are flattered with distinctions and *eminences*, so much is he averse to them. He so little thinks of raising himself, of being above others, and of commanding, that on the contrary he only *loves* to abase himself, to seek the last places, and to obey. He is still more free from spiritual *ambition*; well knowing that it is more dangerous, and more odious to God and men, than the other. He stifles in his heart the smallest bud of it, and never suffers any thing to appear exteriorly, that can give any favorable idea of himself.

He seeks not his own interests, always ready to sacrifice them for the sake of peace, and to preserve charity. His great, his only interest is to be in *cord*.

cord with all mankind, with a reference to God.

He is a stranger to anger, harsh expressions, and to the spirit of contradiction. Meekness accompanies all his words, and reigns in all his proceedings. He rather chuses to yield, when he is in the right, than to support with warmth his opinion. Nothing hurts him, nothing offends him, nothing irritates him. One would think that he is insensible, and that he observes nothing : although he be extremely delicate in sentiment, and nothing misplaced escapes him.

Whilst the false devout man is scandalized at every thing ; and misconstrues every thing, *he thinks no evil*, and interprets every thing in good part ; endeavouring, as far as he can, to see and represent things on their favourable side, to extenuate real blemishes, and to justify the intention, when the action cannot be excused. As he has no malignity, he suspects

none

none in others ; and, to believe any evil, he must be forced to it by evidence.

XXXI.

The politeness of the world is nothing but dissimulation*. The world only expresses esteem and friendship, the better to conceal its coolness and contempt : indifferent to those whom it affects the most to care for ; often even wishing evil to those whose interests they seem the most warmly to espouse. The truly devout man *loves without feint* ; he shews on his countenance what he has in his soul ; his mouth only expresses what he feels. His character is cordiality, that precious virtue, which the world has banished from its commerce, to retain but the semblance of it.

He does not wait till he is prevented by others ; but *he prevents them with marks of honour*. He forgets the

* Rom. xii. 9, &c.

attention that is due to himself, to mind, that which charity prompts him to pay to his neighbour. Not however so, as not to support his dignity, and maintain the privileges of his rank, when propriety demands it; but he is free from all haughtiness and over-delicate pretensions; and, on this account, his right is the less contested.

Politeness only gives, that it may receive: it only makes the first advances on one occasion, that they may be returned to it on another. It measures, it rates its civilities; and it exacts at least as much attention as it bestows; always apprehensive lest something should be wanting in the return, or lest a just value should not be set on its performance. Not so with devotion. Without derogating from what belongs to rank and condition, it knows how to be affable, gracious, obsequious; it humanizes, it familiarizes, it abases itself, it puts

itself on a level with those with whom it converses ; its proffers are frank, natural, disinterested, and free from all selfish views.

Human compassion has often but bare words, and, at most, but barren sentiments. It is partial ; it is inconstant ; it has only a first motion, which is soon spent. Oftentimes the evils to which it is witness, on account of their excess, inspire it with more horror than pity : and if it relieve them, the stomach turns, and the look is taken off. It but too frequently happens, that the humanity, on which people pique themselves, is affected, and blended with ostentation ; that it only does good for the sake of show ; and, in revealing the hidden misery of others, it leaves it room to repent the confidence that was placed in it.

Devotion does not fall into any of these defects. Its commiseration extends itself to all the wretched : it

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shares, from the heart, in their evils and in their wants, as if they were its own. It relieves them efficaciously, by trenching not only on its superfluity, but even on its necessaries. No sort of misery disgusts it ; and the greater the misery is, the more it hastens to succour it. It accompanies its charities with an interested air, a sensibility, a tenderness, that moves, that consoles, that charms the afflicted. Particularly attentive to bashful indigence, it guesses it, it spares it the confusion of an explication, it often conceals the hand that gives it assistance, and does it so secretly, that no one ever surmises it, or catches a whisper of it.

The real devout man appropriates to himself the inward dispositions of his neighbours. *He is joyful with those who are in joy, and he weeps with those who weep**. His soul assumes the sen-

* Rom. xii. 15.

timents of those who approach him, and is affected with that which concerns them. It is not grimace, flattery, or bare politeness ; it is a real and profound interest of a brother, who shares the good things and the evils of his brethren, and considers them as his own.

Lastly, if we consider, on the one hand, what humanity, education and politeness have power to introduce into the commerce of life, that is useful, safe, comfortable and agreeable ; and, on the other, that which a devotion, well understood and practised, introduces also, and that which it would introduce, were it more generally diffused ; we shall be forced to acknowledge, that the whole advantage is on the side of devotion, and that no comparison can be made. To the devout man belongs the encomium in scripture, *of being beloved by God*

*God and by men**, because he serves God in God, and does all the good he can to his neighbours: and if he be not at all times loved by them, it is because they are wicked, envious and ungrateful, because they misunderstand virtue, and refuse to do it justice.

XXXII.

Either the devout man is not devout as he ought to be, or he is a good husband, a good father, a good master, a good friend, a good citizen, a good subject; because the essence of devotion consists in a faithful discharge of all the duties which are annexed to those titles, and to those of a similar nature. There is no case in which it authorizes a deficiency in the least obligation, which results from the connexions, either in natural or civil society, and in which it does not severely condemn the man who is de-

* Eccl. xlvi. 1.

ficient. This is not all ; devotion alone displays to us the full extent of these duties, it binds us in conscience to study them, and makes us find a relish and a pleasure in fulfilling them, at all times, and in every circumstance.

Supposing an equality in all other respects, compare, in every condition, in every profession, the devout man and him who is not so. See which is the best informed, the most assiduous, the most honest, the most punctual, the most nice and the most disinterested ; which is he who thrives the most, of whom the public complains the least, and with whom it is best pleased. Cast an eye on the most elevated station ; examine by whom they have been best filled, by the partisans, or by the enemies of devotion. One may be devout, and want talents : but he neither wants zeal, nor probity, nor the desire of doing what is right. The faults, which are occasioned through

through the want of genius, should not be imputed to devotion, as long as it never prompts us to engage in a charge, an office, a profession to which we are unequal ; as long as it obliges us to omit nothing that may fit us for them ; and even to quit and lay them down, if the public and particulars suffer by us. It is never from devotion that frauds, misdemeanors, injustices, violences and the abuse of authority proceed ; no more than negligence, the want of application, and all the other consequences of a culpable ignorance. All that is good should be set down as to its just account ; it is a stranger to all that is bad ; and, to make it responsible for any thing of the kind, is the height of injustice. This is, in general, what a real devout man is with respect to his fellow-man and to society.

XXXIII.

As to what personally regards himself, devotion renders him happy with

with the only true happiness that can be enjoyed upon earth : it never has happened, that a real devout man had reason to repent him at being so, and it never will happen. It will be said that he hates himself, that he despises himself, that he wars against himself, that he renounces himself : I grant it ; and it is exactly in this where he finds peace, evenness of soul and joy. It is certain, both from reason and the principles of faith, and it is demonstrated, by a constant and universal experience, that the good things of this world, riches, honors, pleasures cannot satisfy the soul, and only provoke its hunger, without affuaging it ; that the passions are the principal source of the miseries which oppress mankind, and that, in respect to the inevitable evils in life, no other philosophy than that of religion can help us to bear them ; or teach us the proper use of them.

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It is also certain, and demonstrated by experience, that God being the only happiness of man, the devotion which brings him to God, which unites him to God, is the true, the only principle of his felicity ; that it preserves him from sin, which is his sovereign evil ; that it secures him from the mischiefs that might ensue from his passions ; that in regard to the other evils, whether natural, or occasioned by the injustice and the malice of his fellow-men, it teaches him to overcome them with patience, and to draw wonderful advantages from them ; that, as to temptations, trials, and other supernatural sufferings, it persuades him that they are not evils, but real good things, that they are remedies which expiate sin, or preserve him from it, occasions to practise virtue, means to sanctify him, and to dispose him to the divine union. Thus it lifts him above all human events, above the vicissitudes of a transitory

sitory life, above himself, and establishes him in an unalterable peace.

On the other hand, God, who is rich in mercy, and who never suffers himself to be overcome in liberality, devotes himself, if I may be allowed to say so, to the man, who is devoted to him ; he treats him as his child, he takes care of him, as the apple of his eye (it is the expression which he himself makes use of) : he lavishes upon him his succours, his consolations, his favours ; in short, he convinces him, by the strongest and most intimate proofs, that he gains all in sacrifice of all ; and that the supreme happiness of the creature is only to be found in the privation of every thing else, and even of itself, in order to secure the possession of the infinite good.

Do not tax me here with falsehood or exaggeration. On the contrary, be assured, that all I say falls far short of the reality. You have,

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on this head, the unanimous deposition of the saints: I refer you to them. You have their writings; consult them, and see if they say less than I do. There is not one amongst them who has not attested, that he was happy in God's service, that he had never been happy before, and that it is the only medium of being happy. Should you say, that you have not experienced this happiness, although you have served God for many years that must proceed, from your not serving him with the same dedication with which the saints did; from your blending, with your devotion, a negligence, a remissness; and a reserve; from your seeking yourself more than you seek God: and from your self-love, which tyrannizes over your soul with fears, desires, vain regrets, and deluding forecasts, with murmurs, interior rebellions and resistances, which it opposes to the reign of the love of God.

XXXIV. You

XXXIV.

You ask me for a model of perfect devotion. What other can I propose than that which has been given to us all in the person of Jesus Christ ! Listen to that divine Master, and study his conduct. He came upon earth to teach you in what true devotion consists. All the lessons of his heavenly doctrine are reducible to that of devotion. His whole life was nothing else but the most absolute devotion, practised in the most excellent manner.

The moment he came into the world, he devoted himself to God his Father, as a victim, to repair the outrages done to his glory, and to effect the reconciliation of man. From that instant, the great cross which he was to carry, was offered to him, that cross comprised the whole sequel of his life, and was to become more and more heavy and painful from the manger to his last gasp. It united, to an incomprehensible degree,

degree, all the sorts of sufferings and ignominies, which could be borne by a soul that was supported by the power of the divinity ; it was to spend on his head all the scourges of the divine justice ; it was to equal and surpass all the pains that were due to the enormous and innumerable iniquities of men. His soul, infinitely illuminated with the divine light, measured the extent of this cross, it distinctly knew all the rigours of it, it foresaw and felt before-hand the inexpressible torments of it.

He accepted it with all the submission, all the love, all the generosity that a God-Man was capable of. He had it always before his eyes ; it was always dear to his heart ; he continually hastened, by his desires, the consummation of his sacrifice ; and the extreme vehemence of those desires was perhaps the greatest of his torments. For, how great soever the excess of it may have been, his love

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went incomparably beyond, and made him wish to suffer still more, if it could be, for the glory of his Father, and for our salvation.

This is the sublime, the divine model of devotion : this is the most faithful and the only true expression of that which God deserves on our part, and of the service which we owe to him. It is only in reference to this wonderful consecration, that God is pleased to be satisfied with ours, weak, imperfect, and unworthy, as it is, of his sovereign Majesty. Our consecration, how far soever it may reach, how great soever it may be conceived to be, is of no value in itself ; it is insufficient to expiate the smallest of our offences, and to merit for us the least degree of glory. There never was but one consecration, which, of itself, is pleasing to God : it is that of Jesus Christ : and from that our consecrations derive all their value.

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Let us therefore cast our eyes upon this perfect and only exemplar, and let us, at first starting, imprint deeply in our minds this grand truth, that God is so much above us, or to speak more properly, that God is so much all, and we so much nothing, that it is impossible for us, by the most extensive and generous consecration that can be imagined, I do not say, to attain to what he has a right to expect from us, but even to do any thing that may draw down upon us a look, and may render us worthy of the slightest mark of his benevolence.

Next to that, after having profoundly humbled and annihilated ourselves, let us intreat him to inspire us with an act of consecration, that shall be acceptable to him, to make us produce this act, with all that love which can enter into the human heart, and to support us, with the power of his grace, in the faith-

ful and constant accomplishment of all the sacrifices which are contained in it.

Finally, because we are nothing of ourselves, and sin from inclination, because there is nothing that is good in us, which is not a gift of God : let us unite our consecration, to that of Jesus Christ ; let us conjure that divine Saviour, to communicate to it some share of the merits of his, to offer it to his Father with his, and to engage him, through his all-powerful mediation, graciously to accept of it.

XXXV.

The essential point is, doubtless, properly to conceive the act of consecration, and to form it in the heart with a full and entire will : for all depends upon knowing the nature and the qualities of our engagement with God, and on generously embracing all the obligations of it. We may justly say here, that the beginning is half of the whole.

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But it is only the half ; we must come to the practice. And the means which lead to the practice, may be reduced to the three following rules, which, if duly observed, will greatly forward us in devotion.

In the first place, our consecration should be constantly present to our mind, according to the example of Jesus Christ. The moment in which we devote ourselves, whether in prayer or at communion, is a moment of fervour, and of a strong and sensible grace. The soul is, as it were, lifted above itself, and transported in God. But that moment soon vanishes : the fervour and the sensible impression of grace is no longer perceived ; the soul comes back to itself, and returns to its former state. A thousand unavoidable cares, which distract it, would make it lose sight of the engagement which it has entered upon, if it were not careful to think of it often, and to render the

remembrance of it habitual. This remembrance rouses and supports it, animates and excites its courage, and is at once a curb to check it, and a spur to forward it on.

The second rule is to behave one's self in every thing, according to the example of Jesus Christ, as one who is devoted to God: that is to say, we must no longer dispose of ourselves, we must no longer form views and projects of any kind whatever; but must leave ourselves in the hands of God, and must undertake nothing, but through the inspiration of his grace: and he never fails to manifest his will to a soul that is determined to accomplish it: nor must we admit of either fear or desire concerning any other objects than those which belong to our consecration: we must constantly fear whatever may make us swerve from it, and ardently desire to be faithful in it; we must consider ourselves henceforward as being under

der the special guidance of providence, and leave the care of our interior to God, without solicitude, without too much reflection on the state we are in, without curiously enquiring into the reasons of what happens to us ; we must accept, with equal thankfulness, what comforts us, and what afflicts us ; what troubles us, and what composes us ; what contradicts us, and what accommodates us ; what depresses us, and what lifts us up : we must believe, without hesitation, that God only has in view our welfare ; and that, provided we adhere to his will, the things, in appearance the most contrary, will turn to our advantage.

This is not the work of one day, but the business of our whole life,—thus to habituate ourselves, in submission, to every event, whether temporal or spiritual. We must be a long while apprentices in this science, before we become masters ; and then only

only do we render ourselves expert in it, when, after reiterated faults, we humble ourselves at them and correct them. But it is indispensable to enter immediately into this general disposition, without which there is no practice of devotion.

The third rule is, to have Jesus Christ always before our eyes, in order to copy him, and express him in our interior and exterior conduct ; we must intreat him to form in us his own image ; and to hold us in his hand, like an immoveable and well stretched-canvas, that is to receive all the traits of that adorable original. For it is Jesus Christ himself, who works upon our soul, and chalks out his own portrait, to which he afterwards adds colours, and the nicest strokes of the pencil, if we put no obstacle to it.

As God made the material world through his Son, it is also through him that he makes the spiritual and super-

supernatural world ; and this world only becomes what it ought to be by a resemblance with Jesus Christ. The saints of the old testament were figures of him, and those of the new have no other model ; and when all the traits of the God-Man shall be expressed in the elect, according to the designs of the eternal Father, the universe will end. *Those, says St. Paul, whom God fore-knew, he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his Son**.

XXXVI.

If the dedication to God, through Jesus Christ, be the first duty of every one who bears the Christian name, with much greater reason is it the grand duty of those, on whom, by their calling, it is incumbent to preach it to others, to teach them the practice, and to set them the example of it : and also of those whom God has with-

* Rom. viii. 29.

drawn from the hurries of life, that they might be devoted to him in a more special manner. And yet are there many who are truly devout in the sacerdotal character and in a religious state? I say it with sorrow; they are almost as few in number, as the gleanings after the reapers, and the grapes after the vintage.

Which then is the soil on which this seed will fall and will fructify? God knows it, and it is for that soil he has made me write. Those souls will relish, will understand, will practise devotion.

As to the others, I already hear them exclaim and complain, that I carry things too far; that I demand too much, and that there is no possibility of being devout in the manner which I point out. But is it I who will have it so? Is it not the nature of the thing itself? Reason as much as you will on devotion: modify it, temper and soften it as much as you can:

can : you never will be able to unite grace and nature, God and the world, the love of God and self-love ; and as long as this union will be impossible, so long shall I be in the right, and shall have demanded nothing but what is just, and even necessary.

I have stretched things too far ! In what ? In styling devotion a dedication or a consecration ? But it is the meaning of the word. In adhering to the idea of consecration ? On what other idea was my whole book to rest ? Was I wrong in asserting, that the devotion, which has God for object, should be interior, without reserve and division ; that it should proceed from love, that it should inspire confidence, that it should dispose us to abandon ourselves to God ; that it should be humble, mortified, and the like, as may be recollect ? Have I said too much ? Have I even said all that could be said on each of those characters ? And if, by a culpable caution

tion I had enfeebled the truth, those who will accuse me of going to extremes, would they not have been the first to charge me with remissness?

Should I have said less, if I had given for title to this work, *the Characters of true Charity*; and if, in unfolding the two grand precepts, of the love of God, and of the love of our neighbour, in which are included the law and the prophets, I had applied to them all that I have ascribed to devotion?

Should I have said less, if, in speaking to the disciples of Jesus Christ, and addressing to them the very words of their master, I had interpreted to them his lessons and his doctrine, according to the sense of the Apostles and the Fathers of the Church? Or if, in proposing to them Jesus Christ as a model, I had strongly represented to them the indispensable necessity of imitating his interior dispositions

positions with regard to God his Father, and the virtues which have shone throughout his whole life, from the manger to the cross ?

Should I have said less, if I had set before their eyes the example of the primitive Christians, our fathers in faith ; and had asked them, if, having the same duties and the same obligations, they were not bound to have the same sentiments, the same conduct, and the same devotion ? And let it not be said, that the circumstances are not the same. I could easily prove, that the present circumstances are more delicate and more dangerous for salvation.

I conclude, that I could not have said less without betraying the cause of my great Master, and that we cannot do less without prejudicing the dearest interests of our soul. The glory of God, for which we are created, the eternal happiness to which we

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are called, as well as our present happiness, are concerned. The matter well deserves mature deliberation, and a prudent decision.



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